ANDIVIUS HEDULIO
VOL.I
BY
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Freeditorial

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER I
AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

When I look back on the beginning of my adventures, I can set the very day and hour when the tranquil course of my early life came to an end, when the comfortable commonplaces of my previous existence altered, when the placid current of my former life broke suddenly and without warning into the tumultuous rapids which hurried me from surprise to surprise and from peril to peril. The last hour of my serene youth was about the ninth of the day, nearly midafternoon, on the Nones of June in the 937th year of the city, [Footnote: A.D. 184. See Note C.] while Cossonius Marullus and Papirius Aelian were consuls, when Commodus had already been four years Emperor.

It was not that misfortune then suddenly overwhelmed me, not that, sharp as a blown trumpet, I heard the voice of doom blare over me; not that, as one sees the upper rim of the sun vanish beneath the waves where the skyline meets the sea, and knows day ended and night begun, not thus that I recognized the end of my prosperity and the beginning of my disasters. That moment came later, as I shall record. It was rather that; as, in certain states of the weather, long before sunset one may be suddenly aware that afternoon is past and evening approaches; so, though I had no intimation at the moment, yet, reviewing my memories I realize that at that instant began the chain of trivial circumstances which led up to my calamity and enmeshed me in ruin.

And just here I cannot but remark, what I have often meditated over, how trifling, how apparently insignificant, are the circumstances which determine the felicity or misery of human beings. I was possessed of an ample estate; I was, in most difficult conditions, in unruffled amity with all my neighbors, on both sides of the great feud, except only my hereditary enemy; I was high in the favor of the Emperor; I was in a fair way to marry the youngest, the most lovely and the richest widow in Rome. In the twinkling of an eye I was cast down from the pinnacle of good fortune into an abyss of adversity. And upon what did my catastrophe hinge? Upon the whims of a friend and upon one oversight of my secretary. I should have had no story to tell, I should have been a man continuously happy, affluent and at ease, early married and passing from one high office to the next higher in an uninterrupted progress of success, had it not entered the head of my capricious crony to pay me an unexpected and unannounced visit, had he not arrived precisely at the time at which he came, had he not encountered just the persons he met just where he did meet them, had not his prankishness hatched in him the vagary which led him to give quizzical replies to their questions; had I not, carried away by my elation at my prosperity and fine prospects, been a trifle too indulgent to my tenantry.

Even after, as a result, the nexus of circumstances had been woven about me and after I found myself embroiled with both my powerful neighbors, I should have escaped any evil consequences had not my secretary, than whom no man ever was more loyal to his master or more wary and inclusive in his foresight upon every conceivable eventuality, failed to forecast the possible effects of a minor omission.

When my story begins I had already had one small adventure, nothing much out of the ordinary. Agathemer and I were returning from my final inspection of my estate. As we rode past one of the farmsteads we heard cries for help. Reining up and turning into the barn-yard, we found the tenant himself being attacked by his bull. I dismounted and diverted the animal's attention. After the beast was securely penned up I was riding homewards more than a little tired, rumpled and heated and very eager for a bath.

As we approached my villa we saw a runner coming up the road, a big Nubian in a fantastic livery which when he reached us turned out to be entirely unknown to me. My grooms were just taking our horses. The grinning black, not a bit out of breath after his long run, saluted and addressed me.

"My master has sent me ahead to say he is coming to visit you."

"Who is your master?" I asked.

"My master," he said, still grinning goodnaturedly, "enjoined me not to tell you who he is."

I turned to Agathemer.

"What do you make of this?" I asked.

"There is but one man in Italy," he replied, "who is likely to send you such a message, and his name is on the tip of your tongue."

"And on the tip of yours, I'll wager," said I. "Both together now!"

I raised my finger and counted.

"One! Two! Three!"

Both together we uttered:

"Opsitius Tanno!"

There was no variation in the Nubian's non-committal grin. We went up the steps and stood by the balustrade of the terrace, where it commanded a good view of the valley. We could see a party approaching, a mounted intendant in advance, a litter, extra bearers and runners and several baggage mules.

"Nobody but Tanno would send me such a message," I said to Agathemer.

"No one else," he agreed, "but I should be no more surprised to see the
Emperor himself in this part of the world."
"One of his wild whims," I conjectured. "Nothing else would tear him away from the city."

I meditated.

"Our arrangements for dinner," I continued, "fall in very well with his coming. I suppose the guest-rooms are all ready, but you had best go see to that, and meanwhile turn this fellow over to Ofatulenus."

Agathemer nodded. The pleasantest of his many good qualities was that whatever he might be asked to do he carried out without comment or objection. Nothing was too big or too small for him. If he were asked to arrange for an interview with the Emperor or to attend to the creasing of a toga he was equally painstaking and obliging. He went off, followed by the negro. I waited on the terrace for Tanno. There was no use attempting to bathe until after his arrival. Presently a cheerful halloo from the litter reached my ears. It was Tanno to a certainty. Nobody else of my acquaintance had voice enough to make himself heard at that distance or was sufficiently lacking in dignity to emit a yawp in that fashion. When his escort came near enough I could see that all his bearers wore the same livery as his runner. Tanno was forever changing his liveries and each fresh invention he managed to make more fantastic than the last. There were eight bearers to the litter and some twenty reliefs. Travelling long distances by litter, begun as a necessity to such invalids as my uncle, had become a fashion through the extreme coxcombery of wealthy fops and the practice of the young Emperor. Tanno's litter had all its panels slid back, and the curtains were not drawn. He was sitting almost erect, propped up by countless down cushions. He greeted me with many waves of the hand and a smile as genial as his halloo. I went down a little from the terrace to meet him and walked a few paces beside the litter. He rolled out and embraced me cordially, appearing as glad to see me as I was delighted to see him.

"I do not know," I said, "whether I am more surprised or pleased to see you. To what do I owe my good fortune?"

"We simply cannot get on without you," he answered, "and I am going to take you back to Rome with me. How soon can you start?"

"You came at the nick of time," said I, "I had expected to go down three days from now, but I found out this afternoon that I can get away tomorrow morning."

"Praise be to Hercules and all the gods," said Tanno. "I love the country frantically, especially when I am in the city. I love it so that three days on the road is enough country for me. I have been bored to death and do so want a bath."

"The bath is all hot and ready," said I, "and the slaves waiting. But I am giving a dinner this evening and nearly all my neighbors are coming. The diners are almost due to arrive, I need a bath and want one, but I meant to wait for my guests."

"Well," he said, "you have one guest here already and that's enough. Let's bathe once, at once, and you can bathe again when your Sabine clodhoppers get here. Life is too short for a man to get enough baths, anyhow. Two a day is never enough for me. A pretext for two in an afternoon is always welcome. Come on, let's bathe quick, so as to have it over with before the first of the other guests arrives, then we can get a breath of fresh air and be as keen for the second bath as for the first."

Conversation with Tanno consisted mostly in listening and interjecting questions. He wallowed in the cold tank like a porpoise; caught me and ducked me until I yelled for mercy, and while I was trying to get my breath, half drowned me with the water he splashed over me with both hands; talking incessantly, except when his head was under water. When we lay down on the divan in the warm room he rattled on.

"You needn't tell me," he said, "that your runners haven't taken letters to Vedia, but she is supposed not to hear from you, so, as I told of two of your letters to me, I have, in a way been held responsible for you and have been pelted with inquiries. Nemestronia loves you like a grandson, and, if you ask me, I say Vedia is in love with you out and out. As I had heard from you and nobody else had, I began to feel as if I ought to look after you. Everything was abominably humdrum and I deceived myself into thinking I should enjoy the smell of green fields. I certainly should have turned back less than half way if I had been concerned with anybody else than you; and when we turned off the Via Salaria into your country byroad I cursed you and your neighbors and all Sabinum. The most deserted stretch of road I ever travelled in all my life. I saw only six human beings before I reached your villa and I had heard that this valley was populous and busy. I slept last

night at Vicus Novus and I started this morning, bright and early. When we turned up the road below Villa Satronia I was never more disgusted in my life. My men are perfectly matched in height, weight, pace and action and any eight of the lot will carry me at full speed as smoothly as a pleasure-barge. But they could make nothing of that road. It is all washed, guttered, dusty in the open places, puddly where trees hang over it and full of loose stones on top everywhere.

"I was so horribly jolted that I called the bearers to stop. I made
Dromanus get off his horse and give me his poncho and his big felt hat.
Then I got on his horse and told him to get into the litter. He was
embarrassed.
"'Pooh', said I, 'you cannot walk and we should look like fools with an empty litter. Get in and be jounced! Draw the curtains; if we meet anybody I'll give you an impressive title.' He rolled in among the cushions, looking as foolish as possible. His horse ambled perfectly and I felt more comfortable. I went on ahead. We had not met anybody since we turned into the crossroads; about half a mile beyond the place where I had left my litter I came around one of the innumerable curves a little ahead of the procession and saw two men approaching on foot. When they came abreast of me they saluted me politely and the taller, a black-haired, dark-faced fellow with a broad jaw, inquired (in the tone he would have used to Dromanus) whose litter I was escorting. I was rather tickled that they took me for my own intendant. I judged we must be approaching the entrance to Villa Satronia and that they were people from there. I assumed an exaggerated imitation of Dromanus' most grandiloquent manner and in his orotund unctuous delivery I declaimed:

"'My master is Numerius Vedius Vindex. He is asleep.' (They swallowed that awful lie, they did not realize how bad their own road was.) 'We are on our way to Villa Vedia.'

"They looked sour enough at that, I promise you, and I made out that they were Satronians for certain. The two fellows exchanged a glance, thanked me politely and went on.

"I knew the entrance to the Satronian estate by the six big chestnut- trees, you had often described them to me; and I knew the next private road by the single huge plane tree. But when we crossed the second bridge, the little one, I went over that round hill and did not recognize the foot of your road when we came to it. I was for going on. Dromanus called from behind the curtains of the litter:

"'This is Hedulio's road: turn to the right.'

"I was stubborn and sang back at him:

"'Hedulio has told me all about this country. This is not his land. It is further on at the next brook.'

"We went on over the next bridge past the entrance to the south, and I felt more and more that Dromanus was right and I was wrong, and yet I grew more and more stubborn. When we passed the sixth bridge and I saw the stream getting bigger and turning to the left, I knew I was wrong. At the crossroads I realized we were at the entrance to Villa Vedia, but I would not give up, I took the left-hand turn and went down stream. Beyond the first bend in the road we found ourselves approaching a long, straggling, one-street village of tall, narrow stone houses along the eastern bank of the little river. By the road, just before the first house, watching five goats, was a boy, a boy with a crooked twitching face.

"'The village idiot,' I put in. 'They can never let him out of sight and he is always beside the road.'

"He was not too big an idiot to tell us it was Vediamnum."

"He was enough of an idiot," I said, "to forget you, and your question the next minute. The boy is almost a beast."

"He had enough sense to tell us the name of the village," Tanno retorted, "and I had to acknowledge to Dromanus he was right, and so we turned round. When we were hardly more than out of sight of Vediamnum we met another party, a respectable-looking man, much like a farm bailiff, on horseback, and two slaves afoot. I had not seen them before, and they, apparently, had not previously seen us. The rider asked, very decently, whose was the party. I treated them as I had the others.

"'My master is asleep,' I said again. (It was not such an improbable lie that time, for the road by Vediamnum is pretty good.) 'I have the honor to escort Mamercus Satronius Sabinus.'

"I had guessed that they were Vedians and I was sure of it when I said that. The slaves scowled and the bailiff saluted very stiffly.

"Just after we turned into your road, I stopped the escort and told Dromanus to take his horse. He had relieved me of his hat and poncho and I had one hand on the litter, ready to climb in, when I heard hoofs behind us on the road. I looked back. There was a rider on a beautiful bay mare coming up at a smartish lope. Just as he came abreast of us she shied at the litter and reared and began to prance about. I give you my word I never had

such a fright in my life. If you can imagine Commodus in an old weather-beaten, broad-brimmed hat of soft, undyed felt and a mean, cheap, shaggy poncho of undyed wool, and worse than the hat, that was the man on the mare. He was left-handed, too."

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"By the way he handled his reins, of course," said Tanno.

"The mare was a magnificent beast, vicious as a fury, with a mouth as hard as an eighty-pound tunny. He sat her like Castor himself. She pirouetted back and forth across the road and my fellows scampered from under her hoofs. The mare was such a beauty I could not take my eyes off her."

"Yes," I put in, "Ducconius has a splendid stud."

"Was he Ducconius?" Tanno exclaimed. "Your adversary in your old law- suit?"

"His son Marcus, from your description," I amplified. "He is proprietor of the property now. His father died last year."

"Well," Tanno went on. "You know that look Commodus has, like a healthy, well-fed country proprietor with no education, no ideas and no thoughts beyond crops and deer-hunting and boar-hunting, with a vacuous, unintelligent stare? Well, that was just the way he looked."

"That is the way young Ducconius looks," I rejoined. "He ought to. You have described exactly what he is."

"Does he know he looks like the Emperor?" Tanno asked, "and how does it happen?"

"Pure coincidence," said I. "The family have been reared in these hills for generations, none of them ever went to Rome. Reate is the end of the world for them."

"Well," Tanno commented, "he might be Commodus' twin brother, by his looks. He'll be a head shorter, in a hurry, if Commodus ever hears of him. He is the duplicate of him. I stood in the road, staring after him, and forgot to climb into the litter. When I woke up and climbed in, my lads swung up your road at a great pace, and here I am. If I had had any sense I'd have been here not much after noon. As it is I have wasted most of the day."

When we went into the hot room, I asked him,

"Where did you get your new bearers? They look to me like Nemestronia's.
What have you done with your Saxons?"
"Nemestronia has them," he explained, "and my Nubians were hers. The dear old lady took a fancy to my Saxons and teased and wheedled until I agreed to exchange. Nobody ever can refuse anything to Nemestronia. I argued a good deal. I told her that even if she is the youngest-looking old lady in Rome it would never do in the world to set herself in contrast to such blue eyes and pink skins and such yellow hair: that Nubians were much more appropriate and that nothing could be more trying than Saxons, even for a bride. She told me I mustn't make fun of her old age and decrepitude. She said that the Saxons had such cheerful, bright faces and looked such infantile giants that she really must have them. So I let her have her way. The Nubians stand the heat better and the Saxons were almost too showy."

Even while the attendant was thumping and kneading him on the slab, Tanno went on talking a cheerful monologue of frothy gossip. I asked him about the Emperor.

"As fretful as possible," he said. "The trouble with Commodus is that he is growing tired of exhibiting himself as an athlete to invited audiences in the Palace. He is perfectly frantic to show himself off in the Circus or in the Amphitheatre. He oscillates between the determination to disregard convention and to do as he likes and virtuous resolutions, when he has been given a good talking-to by his old councillors and has made up his mind to behave properly. He will break out yet into public exhibitions of himself. He is really pathetically unhappy over his hard lot and positively wails about the amount of his time which is taken up with State business and about the pitifully small opportunity he has for training and exercise."

My bath was broken off, sooner than I had intended, by the appearance of one of the kitchen-boys, who asked for me so tragically and so urgently and was so positive that no one else would suffice, that I went down into the kitchen in a towering rage at being interrupted and wondering why on earth I could be needed. I found Ofatulena, wife of the Villa-farm bailiff, in violent altercation with my head-cook. He asserted that she had no business in his kitchen and must get out. Her contention was that she, as bailiff's wife, was above all slaves whatever, that she knew her place and that when a distinguished stranger visited the Villa she would show him what old-fashioned Sabine cooking was like, so she would. The cook had had, through Agathemer, my directions for a formal dinner and he declared that one more guest made no difference and that his dinner was good enough for anybody. I compromised by telling him to continue as he had planned, but to allow Ofatulena to prepare one dish for each course and to add to each one of her own. I was rather pleased at her intrusion, for there was no better cook in Sabinum, and anything old-fashioned was sure to be a novelty to Tanno.

I found Tanno on the terrace, basking comfortably in the late sunshine and gazing down the valley.

"What is that big hill away off to the East?" he asked.

"That is on the Aemilian property," I answered. "Villa Aemilia has a direct outlet to the Via Valeria and the Aemilian Estate does not belong to this neighborhood at all. It runs back to the Tolenus and mostly drains and slopes that way. Huge as the Vedian estates are, and though the Satronian estates are still huger, yet the Aemilian estates are so vast that they are larger than both the Vedian and Satronian lands together. The Aemilian land has much woodland along its western borders and blankets and almost encloses the Vedian and Satronian estates and all of us in between. The road you came up is a sort of detour east of the Salarian way. The Satronians and Vedians and we in between all use it, turning to the right towards Reate and to the left towards Rome."

Tanno blinked at the soft, hazy view and swept his arm southward.

"That is all Satronian over there?" he asked.

"All," I said, "as far as the Aemilian domain."

"Which way," he queried, "is Villa Vedia?"

"To see it from here," I said, "you would have to look straight through this house and half a dozen hills. It is almost due north."

"Vedians to the northward," he continued, "Satronians to the southward, and just you and Ducconius sandwiched in between, clapper-clawing each other."

"No, quite otherwise!" I retorted. "My property does not touch Vedian or Satronian land anywhere, and Ducconius has barely half a mile of boundary line along the Satronian domain. There are six other estates, the largest half as big as mine, the smallest not much bigger than the largest of my tenant-farms; three are on one side of me and three on the other. You will meet the proprietors at dinner, as I told you. They should be here now."

"Goggling country bumpkins?" he conjectured.

"Not a bit like that," I countered, "though you would scarcely call them cultured. There is no art connoisseur among them. They care little for books, but they are educated

gentlemen and can talk of other subjects besides vine-growing and cattle breeding. They have all been to Rome, the Ducconians are the only stay-at-home, stick-in-the-mud family in this valley. You will find all your fellow-diners keenly interested in anything you can tell them about the latest fashions and the latest gossip from Rome. They think and talk of the doings of Rome's fast set much more than you do."

"They have nothing to do with the feud?" he queried.

"Three of them," I explained, "are on the Vedian side, three on the Satronian side, though they are always polite to each other. But it is a frigid politeness and I was anticipating the dinner tonight as a frightful trial. I fancy your presence will ensure its passing off comfortably. Entedius Hirnio will be here, too. His estates are beyond Vediamnum and he has never taken sides in the feud any more than Ducconius or my family."

"Do you ever see Ducconius?" he asked.

"Oh, never," said I, "we take care never to recognize each other, I assure you. We cannot help meeting occasionally, but I never see him and he never sees me. We meet mostly on the road. The lower part of this valley-road where he overtook you is as much his right-of-way as mine, up to where the road forks and is crossed by the Bran Brook. You can see the bridge from here."

Tanno shaded his eyes with his hand.

"That is all his land over there, on the other side of the Bran Brook," I continued. "Further up the valley the brook has three feeders. The Flour rises back of my land on the Vedian estate. The Chaff brook is all mine and the Bran rises in his woodlands."

"Will he appeal the case or reopen it now your uncle is dead?" Tanno queried.

"There is no possibility of appeal," I said, "or of reopening. The case is closed and I have won it forever. And all thanks to Agathemer. But for Agathemer, Ducconius would have won the final hearing as he had won all the intermediate appeals. His defeat after so many victories has embittered him more than if we had won every time and he hates me worse than ever.

"The only unpleasant feature for me is that the tenant of the farm so long in dispute cannot be ousted. He was heart and soul with Ducconius all through the period of the suit. His daughter is married to one of Ducconius' tenants and his younger son has taken one of Ducconius' farms since three of his tenant-families died off year before, last with

the plague. This makes old Chryseros Philargyrus by no means a pleasant tenant for me."

"Old Love-Gold Love-Silver," Tanno commented, "is that a nickname or is it really his name?"

"Really his name," I affirmed. "His mother was so extravagant and wasteful that his father named him Chryseros Philargyrus as a sort of antidote incantation, in the hope that it might prove a good omen of his disposition and predispose him to parsimony. He certainly has turned out sufficiently close-fisted to justify the choice."

"I don't understand your talk about tenantry," said Tanno. "Do you mean you cannot change a bailiff on a farm which you have won incontestably on final appeal in a suit at law?"

"He is no bailiff," I answered him. "He is a free man, just as much as you or I. Sabinum is not like Latium or Etruria or Campania, where the free tenantry has vanished, or like Bruttium or Spain, where there never was any free tenantry. The free tenantry have survived in Sabinum more completely than in any part of the world. I have only one bailiff here and he manages only the villa-farm with a very moderate gang of slaves under him. I do not own any more slaves on my estate. The slaves on the farms are all owned by my tenants and there are eight farms besides the villa- farm; counting Chryseros, there are nine tenant farmers. Each owns slaves enough to work his farms. All the estates about here are managed in that way: Aemilian, Vedian, Satronian, Entedian and all the rest, big or little. We are rather proud of the system and very proud of our tenants."

"It must be a fine system," Tanno sneered. "I have been wondering what kept you away from Rome. I suppose it has been the beautifully smooth and marvellously easy working of your farm-tenant system."

"It works just as well as one slave-gang under one bailiff, if not better," I retorted, hotly.

"Oh, yes," Tanno drawled, "it works just as well as one slave-gang under one bailiff. That is why you have not had to inspect your estates in Bruttium, why you have not visited Bruttium at all, why you have not so much as thought of visiting Bruttium, whereas you have had to spend more than two months here in these fascinating wilds. You can trust your tenantry so completely that you only have to spend two months making sure they are not idling or cheating you: you can trust your Bruttian bailiff so poorly that you let him alone absolutely."

I was more than a little nettled by his ironical mood.

"I spent three months of the year out of the past four years in Bruttium," I argued. "I know every inch of the ranches perfectly. My uncle never allowed me to become acquainted with anything up here. I was his representative and factor in Bruttium. When I visited him here I was no more than a guest and I have had to learn all the workings of the estate from the beginning."

"Nonsense!" Tanno rejoined. "You know each when you see it. If the tenants pay their rent on time, what do you need to know about how they run their farms?"

"They pay cash and on time," I explained, "but the cash represents half the yield and each manages the sale of his own produce. It is necessary for the proprietor to understand the capacities of each farm."

"And you are proud of a tenantry," he sneered, "so honest that you cannot trust them not to swindle you out of your just dues and on whom you have to spy all the time to get what you should get from them."

"You do not understand," I declared.

"Right you are," said Tanno. "I do not and I do not want to."

"Just wait a moment and do not interrupt," I urged. "You do not understand, there is no use in being a proprietor if you do not know more than your tenantry. There are a thousand, there are ten thousand details in which the management of the farms may be made more profitable or less profitable, and all these details have to be watched and must be well in the proprietor's mind."

"Could you not get some kind of overseeing general estate bailiff to do all that for you?" he suggested.

"I can," I said, "and I'm going to get one. My uncle's overseer died of the plague and my uncle was too old and too set in his ways to get another, so he acted as his own overseer for the last four years of his life. I must know of my own knowledge just how the place ought to be managed or I can never detect and forestall unnecessary and ruinous friction and trouble between my tenantry and any new superintending overseer."

"I do not know," Tanno ruminated, "which to admire more, the beauties of the Sabine tenant system or the wonders of the Sabine character. Any other man I know would have stayed in Rome and attended strictly to his courtship and let his estates take care of

themselves. You are supposed to be violently in love and you certainly behave like it: yet you leave Rome and Vedia and shut yourself up among these damp cold hills and inspect and reinspect and make a final inspection, and delay for one last peep and linger for one final glance, where any other man would ignore the property and be with the widow."

"I do not see anything extraordinary about it," I disclaimed. "A man needs an income, a lover most of all."

"Income!" he snorted. "Isn't your income from your Bruttian estates ten times the gross return from the property?"

"More than ten times," I admitted.

"Why worry about it at all then?" he demanded. "Isn't your Bruttian income enough?"

"No income is enough," I declared, "if a man has a chance to get in more."

"Of course," he beamed, "you do not see anything extraordinary in your petting this property. A Sabine would use up a year to get in a sesterce from a frog pond. You are a Sabine. All Sabines worship the Almighty Sesterce. But to anybody not a Sabine it is amazing to see a lover postponing prayers to Lord Cupid until he has finished the last detail of his ceremonial duties to Chief Cash, Greatest and Best."

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CHAPTER II
A COUNTRY DINNER

Just then Tanno caught sight of a horseman approaching up the valley. I looked where he pointed.

"That will be Entedius Hirnio," I said. "Of my dinner guests he lives furthest away and so he always comes in first to any festivity."

"How far beyond Vediamnum does he live?" Tanno enquired.

"On the other side of the Vedian lands," I explained. "His property is over the divide towards the Tolenus, in between Villa Vedia and Villa Aemilia."

Entedius it was, as I made sure, when he drew nearer, by his magnificent black mare. He covered the last hundred paces at a furious gallop, pulled up his snorting mare abruptly, and dismounted jauntily. Plainly, at first sight, he and Tanno liked each other. When I had introduced them they looked each other up and down appraisingly, Entedius appearing to relish Tanno's swarthy vigor, warm coloring and exuberant health as much as did Tanno his hard-muscled leanness and weather-beaten complexion.

"Are you any relation to Entedia Jucunda?" Tanno queried.

"Very distant," Hirnio replied, "very distant indeed: too far for us to call each other 'cousin.' When I am in Rome I always call on her; once in a while she invites me to one of her very big dinners; otherwise we never see each other."

Almost before they had exchanged greetings Mallius Vulso rounded the house from the east and then Neponius Pomplio from the west; after he had been presented, the two other Satronians, Bultius Seclator and Juventius Muso, cantered up, followed closely by Fisevius Rusco and Lisius Naepor, both adherents of the Vedian side of the feud.

As soon as the stable-boys had led off their horses we started bathwards, delayed a moment by the arrival of a slave of Entedius, on a mule, leading another heavily laden with two packs. We made a quick bath, with no loitering, and at once went in to dinner. My uncle had been to the last degree conservative and old-fashioned. He would have nothing to do with any new inventions, save his own. So he would not hear of any alterations in the furnishings of his villa, except those suggested by his ideas of

sanitation. Otherwise it had been kept just as my grandfather had left it to him. In particular uncle could not be brought to like the newly popular C-shaped dining sofas, which all Rome and all fashionables all over Italy and the provinces had so acclaimed and so promptly adopted along with circular-topped dining-tables. My triclinium still held grandfather's square-topped table and the three square sofas about it. Uncle's will, in fact, had stipulated that no furnishings of the villa must be altered within five years of the date of his death. As I had to adjust my formal dinners to the old style, I was not only delighted to have Tanno with us for himself and for his jollity, but also because he just made up the nine diners demanded by ancient convention.

Agathemer had asked me, as a special favor, to leave the decoration of the triclinium entirely to him, and I had agreed, when he fairly begged me, not to enter the triclinium or even pass its door, after my noonday siesta. When I did enter it with my guests I was dazzled. The sun had just set and the northwestern sky was all a blaze of golden brightness, streaked with long pink and rosy streamers of cloud, from which the evening light, neither glaring nor dim, flooded through the big northwestern windows. The spacious room was a bower of bloom. Great armfuls of flowers hid the capitals of the pilasters, others their bases; garlands—heavy, even corpulent garlands—were looped from pilaster to pilaster; every vase was filled with flowers, the little vases on the brackets, the big ones alternating with the statues in the niches, the huge floor-vases in the corners: the table, the sofas, the floor, all were strewn with smaller blossoms, tiny flowers or fresh petals of roses. The garlands for our heads, which were offered us heaped on a tray, were to the last degree exquisite. I adjusted mine as if in a dream. I was dazed. I knew that the flowers could not have been supplied by our gardens; I could not conjecture whence they came.

Agathemer, bowing and grinning, stood in the inner doorway. My eyes questioned his.

"I have a note here," he said, "which I was enjoined not to hand you until you had lain down to dinner."

The two second assistant waiter boys took our shoes and we disposed ourselves on the sofas, Tanno in the place of honor, I rejoicing again that his presence had solved, acceptably to all the rest, the otherwise insoluble problem of to whom I should accord that location.

Agathemer handed me the note. At sight of it I recognized the handwriting of Vedius Caspo. Of course, like my uncle before me, I always invited to any of my formal entertainments all my neighbors except Ducconius Furfur, our enemy, and the only neighbor with whom we were not on good terms. Equally, of course, Vedius Caspo at Villa Vedia and Satronius Dromo at Villa Satronia, regularly found some transparent

pretext for declining my invitation, each fearing that, if he accepted, the other might by some prank of the gods of chance accept also, and they might encounter each other.

The thread was too strong for me to break. I tore it out of the seal, and, asking my guests' indulgence, I opened the note. It read:

"Vedius Caspo to his good friend Andivius Hedulio. If you are well I am well also. I was writing at Villa Vedia on the day before the Nones of June. I had written you some days before and explained my inability to avail myself of your kind invitation to dinner on the Nones. I purposed sending you, with this, what flowers my gardens afford towards decorating your triclinium for your feast. I beg that you accept these as a token of my good will. When you reach Rome I beg that, at your leisure and convenience, you transmit my best wishes to my kinswoman, Vedia Venusta.

"Farewell."

This note staggered me more than the sight of the flowers. It was amazing that Vedius should have taken the trouble to be so gracious to me; that he should go out of his way to write me the vague and veiled, but unequivocal intimation of his approval of my suit for Vedia implied in the last sentences of his letter was astounding. Vedia had a very large property inherited from her father, from two aunts and from others of the Vedian clan. The whole clan was certain to be very jealous of her choice of a second husband. I had anticipated their united opposition to my suit. To be assured of his approbation by the beloved brother of the head of the clan made me certain that I should meet with no opposition at all.

My delight must have irradiated my face. Tanno, the irresistible, at once urged me to read the note aloud, saying:

"Don't be a hog. Don't keep all those good things to yourself. Let us have a share of the tid-bits. Read it out to all of us."

I yielded.

Of course the three Satronians looked sour. But Tanno knew how to smooth out any embarrassing situation. He beamed at me and fairly bubbled with glee.

"I bet on you," he said. "The widow will be yours at this rate. But don't show her that note till you two are married."

Before anybody else could speak he went on:

"I'm famished. So are we all. Flowers are fine to look at and to smell, but give me food. Let's get at our dinner."

We did. We fell upon the relishes, disposing of them with hardly the interchange of a word.

When the boys cleared the table I observed with some pride that Tanno eyed with an expression of approval the table cloth and the big silver tray which they set on it, laden with the second course.

"You are," he said, "pretty well equipped for house-keeping in these remote wilds, Caius. Your table-cloth is far above the average for town tables and your tray is magnificent."

That started a round of talk on city usages, town etiquette and court gossip. Tanno, very naturally, did much of the talking, the rest mostly questioning and listening. He spoke at length of the Emperor, but of course more guardedly than while talking to me alone.

When the tray with the first course was removed and while that with the second course was being brought in the talk ebbed. Tanno gave it a turn, which at first seemed likely to prove unfortunate, by saying:

"Now I've told you the latest news from Rome and the current gossip and the popular fads. Turn about is fair play. It is time for some of you to tell me what just now most interests this country-side. My idea of country life is that it is about as exciting as the winter sleep of a dormouse or of a hibernating bear; but for all I know, it may be as lively in its way as life in town; you may be agog over some occurrence as important to you as a change of Palace Prefects would be at Rome. Speak out somebody, if there is anything worth telling."

"Whether it be worth telling I do not know," spoke up Bultius Seclator, "but the country-side hereabouts is agog just now over a recent case of abduction."

(I shuddered: here was the feud to the fore in spite of everything. And I shuddered yet more as I saw set and harden the features of Vulso, Rusco and Naepor.)

"To make clear to you," he went on, "I'll have to explain the circumstances. You undoubtedly know both Satronius Dromo of this valley and his father, Satronius Satro, at Rome. Satro's father, old Satronius Satronianus, among the horde of slaves set free by his will, liberated a number of artisans of various kinds, who, scattered about among the neighboring towns and villages, had lived like free men, in dwellings belonging to him or

in rented abodes, plying their trades and returning to their master a better income than he could have derived from their activities in any other way, since one of his assistant overseers saw to it that they paid in, unfailingly and promptly, the stipulated percentage of their gains. Among these was a cobbler named Turpio, at Trebula. He was so expert, so deft, so quick and so ingratiating to customers, that the overseer insisted on his paying a percentage of his earnings larger than that paid by any other similar slave. Now cobbling, at the best of it, is not an occupation at which one would fancy that anyone would become wealthy. Yet Turpio grew to be very well off. He early amassed savings enough to pay for his own freedom, but his master would not agree to that, so Turpio bought the house in which he lived and his workshop. In the course of time he accumulated possessions of no mean value and owned several slaves, whom he employed as assistant cobblers. By his master's will all that he had amassed became his property, of course, when he was freed. He was, as he is, very popular in Trebula and among all the country-folk round about who visit Trebula. He is esteemed by all who know him and by all Satronians of every degree.

"Now Turpio, some years ago, partly on account of his kind-heartedness, partly since he could never resist a bargain and he got her for almost nothing, partly, perhaps because of his canny foresight, bought a wretched, puny, sickly, little runt of a four-year-old slave-girl, a mere rack of bones covered with yellow skin. She continued sickly for some years, then, when she was more than half grown, the fresh air of Trebula, its good water, the kindness with which she was treated, the generous fare accorded her, all working together, suddenly began to show results. She plumped out, grew tall, vigorous, active, graceful and charming. She also acquired notable skill at weaving. His intimates congratulated Turpio on his luck or prescience and foretold for him notable profits from her sale. Turpio averred that he and his spouse were so fond of the girl that he was unwilling to part with her except to a master or mistress whom she took to and who seemed likely to be kind to her. He refused several handsome offers for her. She became notable in Trebula as its most beautiful inhabitant and all who knew her wished her well.

"Not long ago, Vedius Molo of Concordia, not a bad specimen of a noble lad, I will say, came to Villa Vedia. He roamed about the country as a young nobleman will. By some chance he caught sight of Xantha, for that is her name, and, of course, like many another, fell in love with her. He promptly offered to buy her. But Xantha did not like him at all and Turpio, as always, consulted her before deciding to sell her. Opposition inflamed Molo and he bid Turpio up till his business instincts all but overcame his doting affection for Xantha. But Xantha liked Molo less and less the more she saw of him. She begged Turpio not to sell her to Molo. He was obdurate, although Molo bid on up till he was offering a really fabulous price, though one well within his means. He could not credit that Turpio would not yield. When he was convinced that he could not

wheedle him he lost his temper. Turpio told him that the negotiations were at an end and warned him not to return. Molo went off in a rage.

"Two nights later Turpio's house was broken into by a considerable body of men, armed, certainly with clubs or staffs. Turpio and his household defended themselves vigorously and were all severely mishandled in the affray, Turpio most severely of all. They were overcome, even overwhelmed, and, before their neighbors could come to their assistance or the townsmen in general rally to help, Xantha was carried off by the intruders, who, beating the night watchman insensible, escaped through the postern of the north gate.

"This highhanded outrage has greatly incensed all Trebula and the entire neighborhood. The night was very dark, neither Turpio nor any of his household nor yet the watchman at the postern claims to have recognized any of the abductors. Yet all impute the outrage to Vedius Molo. Every magistrate is alert to punish the delinquents and to return Xantha to her master. Yet she has totally vanished. After they passed the postern her abductors left no trace. Whether they had or had not with them a two- wheeled or a four-wheeled carriage or a litter or a sedan-chair cannot be determined; nor whether they were on foot or on horseback. The weather was dry and windy and the rocky roads out of Trebula showed no tracks of any kind. The country has been scoured in every direction and all persons questioned, not only at the change-stations on the main roads, and at crossroads, but at all villages. Not a clue has been found; though all Turpio's friends more than suspect Vedius Molo, there is not an iota of evidence on which anyone could base a demand for a warrant to search Villa Vedia or any other specified villa, farmstead or other piece of property. Xantha has vanished. There are rumors that she is at Villa Vedia, but they seem as baseless as the rumor of a party of horsemen conveying a closed litter, which rumor has radiated from uncountable localities all about here, not one of which localities could, when their inhabitants were questioned, substantiate the rumor in any way. Equally baseless appear the numerous rumors that this or that individual has it on unimpeachable authority that Xantha's abductors are camped somewhere in this or that woodland and are preparing to smuggle Xantha into Villa Vedia by that route which they deem least probable for such a venture and therefore least watched. With all this the country-side is agog, I can assure you."

"Fairly exciting, I admit," Tanno remarked when Bultius paused. "Sounds like the tales of goings-on in Latium in the days when the Aequi, Volsci and Hernici raided up to the gates of Rome four summers out of five. I had not thought Sabinum so primitive."

Before I could speak, Fisevius Rusco cut in.

"Bultius," he said, "Vulso and Naepor and I have listened without any interruptions to your version of the occurrences you have narrated, and I must say you have told them as

fairly as could be expected from any one with your leanings. I have no remarks to make on your story nor anything to say in rebuttal. But it seems to me, it is now your turn, along with Nepronius and Juventius, to listen with equal patience, while I narrate a similar story."

The three Satronians bowed stiffly and in silence.

Rusco resumed, addressing Tanno:

"I shall not," he said, "be compelled to go into details as minutely as did Bultius. You can comprehend my story with less background.

"At Reate, for some years past, there lived a worthy couple, freedman and freedwoman of Vedius Vindex. The husband died more than a year ago, leaving a young and childless widow, named Greia Posis, possessed of a good town-house and of three small farms not far out in the country. Naturally as she was comely and well-off, Greia soon had suitors aplenty. For some time she showed no favor to any, but lately it has been plain that she would marry either Helvidius Flaccus, a tenant-farmer holding his land under one of the Vedian clan near Reate, or Annius Largus, similarly a tenant of one of the Satronian properties. Although Helvidius was on Greia's side of our local feud, while Annius was on the other, idlers at Reate were laying wagers that Annius would win Greia, considering him most in her favor.

"Recently, however, Greia had some sort of a quarrel with Annius, and announced her intention of marrying Helvidius.

"You must understand that Greia has the best sort of reputation, is universally respected, and is greatly liked by all her neighbors and acquaintances and is popular in Reate.

"Now, a day or two after the abduction which Bultius has narrated, Greia had visited one of her farms and, towards dark, was returning home to Reate in a two-wheeled gig driven by a slave of hers, a deaf-mute lad. What occurred can only be conjectured, as the deaf-mute cannot relate it, but, at all events, he was found insensible, bruised and bleeding, by the road, apparently having been unmercifully beaten. Not far from him the mule was grazing by the roadside, his harness in perfect condition and the gig unharmed. Greia, however, had vanished. No one had seen Annius in the neighborhood, yet it is generally assumed that he managed to abduct Greia in broad daylight without any one sighting him either coming or going: which, if the fact, would be an almost miraculous feat.

"Certainly Greia has disappeared. The magistrates of Reate searched Annius' farmstead, but found neither Greia nor, indeed, any trace of Annius himself. It is conjectured that he is hiding, with Greia, at some farm or villa under the Satronian protection. But there is no shadow of any tangible basis for the conjecture, nor for the rumors, which, like those concerning Xantha which Bultius had told you of, run all over the country-side; very similar rumors, too; for some are to the effect that Annius is holding Greia in durance at Villa Satronia; others that a cortege of horsemen escorting a closed litter has been seen here or there on some road; others that someone has learnt that Annius is about to attempt to reach Villa Satronia with Greia, convoyed by an escort of his clansmen. The country-side buzzes with such whispers.

"And let me point out to you, what you undoubtedly comprehend, that serious as is the forcible abduction of a slave-girl, the abduction of a freewoman, even if a freedwoman, is a far more serious matter. Not only is Helvidius on fire to reclaim his bride and to revenge himself on Largus, not only are all his relations, friends and well-wishers eager to assist him by every means in their power, not only are all right-thinking men incensed at the outrage, but the magistrates of Reate are determined to bring the guilty man to justice and to free Greia."

Pomplio paused.

"Very well told," was Tanno's comment, "and I comprehend far better than you perhaps imagine. Not only are the magistrates of Reate hot on the trail of Annius and those of Trebula equally keen after Vedius Molo, but all Vedians are eager to shield Molo and to help catch and convict Annius Largus, and all Satronians conversely doing all they can to shield Largus and get Molo. Oh, I twig! Moreover I realize that all Vedians regard the abduction of Greia as not so much a hot-headed folly of Largus as a Satronian retort to the abduction of Xantha; and conversely, all Satronians regard it as merely an insufficient counter to Xantha's abduction. Oh, I comprehend the feud atmosphere. I have no doubt that scores of poniards of the Vedian clan are sharp and daily sharpened sharper, for use on Largus and as many Satronian dirks for use on Molo; that every road hereabouts has watchers posted along it; that bands of lusty lads are camped here and there waiting summonses or are actually in likely ambushes by the roadsides. I foresee shindies of great amplitude. You need not say any more; neither of you need say any more; none of you need say any more. In fact, I beg that the whole subject be dropped right here. I comprehend the feud atmosphere and I don't want any more of it in this triclinium. Let's forget or ignore the feud and enjoy Hedulio's good fare."

His compelling personality exerted its magic, as usual. All six feudists relaxed. I could feel the social tension dissolve. We all felt relieved.

By that time we had disposed of the fish and roasts, the boys had lighted the hanging lamps and the standing lamps, had removed the tray with what we had left of the roasts and had brought in the third-course tray with the birds and salads. As we sampled them Tanno remarked:

"You have a cook, astonishingly good, Caius, for anywhere outside of Rome and amazingly good for a villa in the hills, far from a town. I must see your cook and question him. His roasts, his broiled, baked and fried dishes are above the averages, yet nothing wonderful. But his ragouts or fricassees or whatever you call them, are marvellous. This salmi of fig- peckers (or of some similar bird, for it is so ingeniously flavored and spiced, that I cannot be sure) is miraculous. There was a sort of chowder, too, of what fish I could not conjecture, which was so appetizing that I could have gorged on it. Just as provocative and alluring was one of the concoctions of the second course, apparently of lamb or kid, but indubitably a masterpiece. I certainly must see your cook."

"My cook," I confessed, "was not the artist of the dishes you praise so highly. Hereabouts we do not give them such high-sounding names as you apply to them, we call them hashes or stews. Ofatulena, the wife of my villa-farm bailiff, devised them and prepared them. She is famous hereabouts for her cooking."

"What," cried Tanno, "a woman cook! Never saw a woman cook, never heard of one, never read of one. Egypt, Babylonia, Lydia, Persia, Greece and Italy, all cooks have always been men. I ought to know all about cookery, what with my library on cookery and my travels to all the cities famous for cookery. But you have taught me something novel and wholly unsuspected. Trot out your female cook. Let's have a look at her."

I sent for Ofatulena and she came in, pleased and embarrassed, flushed brick-red all over her full moon of a face, diffident and elated, trembling and giggling.

Tanno questioned her and satisfied himself that she had prepared the dishes which had won his approbation and also that she was no hit-or-miss cook, but a real artist in the kitchen, and really knew what she was doing.

"Beware, Hedulio," he said as he dismissed her. "You Sabines will have three abductions to gossip over if you do not look out. I'm half tempted now to suborn some of the riff-raff of the Subura to kidnap this miracle- worker of yours and hale her to Rome into my kitchen to amaze my guests."

When she was gone he resumed:

"Everything is topsy turvy in Sabinum, woman cooks and tenant farmers! What next? I gather that all of you, Satronians, Vedians and outsiders, have your estates parcelled out among free tenant farmers. Am I right?"

Hirnio, Seclator and the rest assured him that he was right.

"Well, then," he said, "tenant farming must be a subject perfectly safe for all persons present. Let's talk about it. Hedulio has tried to expound to me the beauties of the system, but he had no great success. I fail so far, to comprehend how the institution ever came into existence, why it has maintained itself only in Sabinum and what are its advantages. Tell me about it."

Tanno had hit upon one of the few subjects on which all present felt concordantly. His utterance started a hubbub, all my guests talking at once, each trying to out-talk all the others and all voicing our local enthusiasm for our local farm-system. The triclinium rang with paeans of praise of our Sabine yeomanry, and when the excitement had abated enough to permit of intelligible discourse, Tanno was regaled with a series of tales illustrating the sterling worth of the Sabine yeomen, their knowledge of farming, their diligence, their patience, their unflagging energy, their parsimony, their amazing productivity in respect to crop- yield, stock, implements and all things raised or made on their farms, their devotion to their landlords, the charm of the ties between the gentry and the yeomanry and the universal Sabine cult of the tenant system.

With all this talk we lingered longer than usual over Ofatulena's bewitching salads, which Tanno lauded even above her ragouts.

When it was time for the last course, after the service-boys had slid the third-course tray off the table, I was amazed to see my four strongest table slaves enter fairly staggering under the load put upon them by Grandfather's biggest dinner-tray heaped with fruit, among which I descried African pomegranates and other exotics. Still more was I amazed when other slaves crowded in behind them, carrying baskets of hot-house melons of astonishing size and insistent perfume. Last of the procession was Agathemer, who stood in the doorway, grinning and beaming.

Tanno, not less than the guests in chorus, acclaimed this unexpected profusion.

Again I looked interrogatively at Agathemer. He responded as at the commencement of our meal.

"I have a note here," he said, "which I was enjoined not to hand you until after this fruit had been set upon your table."

He handed me the missive, the superscription of which was, to my astonishment, in the handwriting of Satronius Dromo. While my fingers tugged at the thread, Tanno commanded:

"Read it out loud at once, like the other. No secrets here. Let us all in."

The letter began with all the traditional polite formalities, as had that from Vedius. It read:

"Satronius Dromo to his valued friend Andivius Hedulio. If you are well I am well also. I was writing at Villa Satronia on the day before the Nones of June. Some days before I had written you expressing my regret at the circumstances which prevented me from accepting your most welcome invitation to dine with you on the Nones. I intended dispatching to you, with this, what fruit my establishment has fit for your acceptance, which I ask of you, this fruit being sent as an earnest of my cordiality. When you are settled at Rome I beg that, when perfectly convenient to you, you convey my warmest regards to my cousin's widow, Vedia Venusta.

"Farewell."

At this letter I was fairly thunderstruck. That Satronius should take any notice of me at all was more amazing than the graciousness of Vedius. That he should have ransacked the provinces and overstrained the capabilities of rowers and horseflesh to send me costly rarities out of season was astounding. That his last sentence should practically duplicate the last sentence of the letter from Vedius was most incredible of all. For if all Vedians were sure to be very decidedly hypercritical as to anyone likely to become Vedia's second husband, it was still more a certainty that the entire Satronian connection would scrutinize minutely everything concerning any man likely to come into control of the great properties which she had inherited from her husband, Satronius Patavinus. That I should be disfavored by the entire Satronian connection had seemed to me more than likely. Dromo's intimation of his warm approval of my suit for Vedia, coming on top of Caspo's, cleared of all obstacles my path towards matrimony with the woman of my heart's choice. I was more than elated, I was drunk with ecstacy.

After I had finished reading, dead silence reigned in the triclinium; even Tanno was too dumbfounded to utter any sound.

Hirnio spoke first.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I beg of you to hear me out with attention. Like our Caius here and like his hereditary antagonist, Ducconius Furfur, I have never taken sides in our age-long local feud. Like all outsiders and like a majority of its partisans, I have grieved at its existence, deplored its unfortunate results and hoped for its extinction. I think I may say with truth that there was not one inhabitant of this neighborhood who did not rejoice when the heads of the two families, with the abolition of the feud and the creation of the permanent amity in view, arranged a marriage between the lovely daughter of the head of the northern branch of the Vedian House and the son of the northern branch of the Satronian House. Satronian or Vedian; freeman or slave, everyone was delighted at the prospect of lasting harmony. The sudden death of Satronius Patavinus not only blasted these hopes, but intensified antagonisms; for all the Vedians felt that a daughter of the clan had been sacrificed in vain and all Satronians regretted that vast properties about Padua, long possessed by Satronians, passed by the will of her husband to a young widow, born of the Vedian House. All saw the prospect of exacerbated enmities and their probable results.

"Now it must be apparent to you that the two letters which we have heard read would never have been written without their writers having consulted with the heads of their respective houses. These letters are an intimation to our Caius that both her kinsmen and the kinsmen of her first husband smile upon his suit for the most lovely, the most charming and the wealthiest widow in Rome. This means, to a certainty, that both Satronius Satro and Vedius Vedianus descry the possibility that Vedia's union with a second husband acceptable to both clans and opposed to neither may work for mitigation of the feud spirit and for establishment of harmonious amity almost as powerfully as would have the permanency of her membership of the Satronian clan. I conceive that all of us, outsiders and partisans, may congratulate Caius without reservation or afterthought, heartily and enthusiastically."

To this all present agreed in chorus, all drank my health.

Vulso, rather hesitatingly, spoke next.

"As all we say here," he began, "is under the rose and will not be repeated or hinted at, I do not mind saying that I feel as does Hirnio."

To this Rusco and Naepor agreed, with less hesitancy.

Similarly the three Satronians expressed their concurrence.

Again they all congratulated me on my luck, drank to the success of my suit, and to my prosperity and health.

Complete harmony reigned and the strained social atmosphere attending a dinner in the feud area vanished completely.

By this time the moon, which was nearly full, was high enough to bathe the world with silvery light. Tanno peering across the table and through the windows, remarked:

"You have a fine prospect, Caius. I admired it when I first lay down, but our interest in the flowers and in your letter from Vedius diverted my intention to speak of it. It is a charming outlook even by moonlight."

"Yes," I admitted, with not a little pride. "Grandfather, of course, dined earlier than is fashionable nowadays. He built this triclinium so that he could bask in the rays of the declining sun and could watch the sunset colors as they varied and deepened. My uncle used to dine as early as his father and, even in the hottest weather, enjoyed the direct rays of the sun on him as he dined, for he was always rheumatic and chilly, yet he enjoyed the beauty of the view even more."

"It is charming even by moonlight," Tanno repeated, "and that although the villa is between our outlook and the moon, so its shadow darkens the nearer prospect."

We all contemplated the view through the window. "Who are those men I see just beyond the shadow of the house?" Tanno queried. "Quite an assemblage, it seems to me; almost a mob for these lonely districts."

I looked where he indicated and could not conjecture what it was that I saw.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER III
TENANTRY AND SLAVERY

Agathemer came in and explained that my tenants had a petition to present to me and had gathered, hoping that I would receive them after dinner. (Doubtless, I thought, conjecturing that I would be, just after dinner, in the most accommodating humor possible.)

"I must see this and hear what they have to say," Tanno declared. "Have you any objections to our going with you, Caius?" he asked.

On my saying that I should be glad to have him come along, he said:

"Come on, all of you, it will be fun, and standing out in the night cool will freshen our zest for our wine."

All nine of us went out on the terrace. The prospect was indeed beautiful, only the brighter stars showing in the pale sky, the far hills outlined against it, the nearer hills darkly glimmering in the moon-rays, the valleys all full of pearly moonlit haze, the pleasance about the villa vague in the witchery of the moon's full radiance.

In that full radiance, on the path below the balustrade of the terrace, were my nine tenant farmers. Not one, as was natural among our healthy hills, but was my elder. Yet, according to our customary mode of address from master to tenant, I said to them:

"What brings you here, lads, so long after your habitual bed-time?"

Ligo Atrior acted as spokesman.

"We have a request to prefer," he said, "and we judged this an opportune time."

"Speak out," I said, "our wine is waiting for me and my guests, and I am listening. Speak out!"

He set forth, at considerable length and with many halts and repetitions, that all their farms were in excellent order and in an exceedingly forward condition, promising very well for the future in all respects; that I had just assured myself of all this by a minute inspection; that they were keenly emulous of each other and each thought his farm the

best of the nine; that they were and had been very curious to learn which of the nine farms I thought the best kept; that someone had suggested that, if I judged any one of the nine distinctly better than his fellows', it would be proper to distinguish the man of my choice by some gift, bonus, exemption or privilege, if his farm was really the best kept; that while discussing these matters someone had remarked that he envied me my approaching visit to Rome, as he had never been there; that this had brought to their notice that not one of them had ever seen Rome, though it was less than three days' journey away; that someone had suggested that perhaps I might be induced not only to specify which of them I considered the best farmer, but to indicate my preference by allowing the best of them to visit Rome later in the summer, after the crops were all harvested; that they had agreed to abide loyally by my choice and that they prayed me to declare which of them, in my opinion, was the best farmer.

When Ligo paused, old Chryseros Philargyrus, his wiry leanness manifest even in the moonlight, although he was well muffled up against the dampness of the night, pushed himself to the front and said that he claimed that, in any such competition, he ought to stand on a level with my eight other tenants, even if they had been life-long tenants of the estate, whereas he, like his father and grandfather, had paid rent to Ducconius Furfur. He claimed that the court decision by which Ducconius had had to refund to my uncle all the rents received from the farm in dispute since the first decision of the lowest court had awarded it to a Ducconius had been, in effect, an affirmation that his ancestors and he had always been, constructively, tenants of the Andivian estate.

The old man spoke well and tersely, made his points neatly and stated his arguments lucidly, and, in conclusion he said:

"And you must realize, Sir, that whatever my feelings have been up to today, after what happened this afternoon I have forgotten that I or mine ever owned Ducconius Furfur as master. I am your man henceforward, body and soul; I call you not only patron but savior and father. I make my plea for treatment putting me on full equality with my fellows, and I value myself so highly that I hope for the prize. Yet if I am not the lucky man, I shall loyally and in silence abide by your decision."

I was pleased with his words and I admitted the correctness of his contentions, but rebuked him for his self-assertive manner.

Then Ligo spoke again.

"Please publish your opinion, Master, for we are sleepy and long to be abed. But much more do we long for your decision, for each one of us considers himself a better farmer than any other and expects to be the chosen man."

I smiled.

"Suppose," I said, "that I am of the opinion that no one of you is better than all his fellows, but that two of you are better than the other seven, but equal to each other in merit?"

Ligo stood at loss, but old Chryseros spoke out at once, saying:

"In that case, Master, it would be proper that both men go to Rome, as such a prize could not be divided into shares."

His forwardness angered me. I told him sharply to mind his manners and to keep his place; that Ligo had been chosen spokesman and that he was to hold his peace. I also pointed out that I had not agreed to give any such prize for distinguished excellence, that far less had I agreed that a visit to Rome should be the prize.

All nine of them stood mute.

I was tingling with my elation over my prospects of winning Vedia, for I felt sure of her personal favor, and the two notes from my great neighbors had thrown me into a sort of trance of rapture. I was genuinely pleased with the frugality, diligence and skill of my tenants. My estate was in a way to return far more than I had expected of it. I was in a position to be liberal, I felt indulgent.

"Lads," I cried, "everyone of the nine of you is as good a farmer as everyone of the other eight. You are the nine best farmers in Sabinum. You are such good farmers that you have put your farms in a state where your bailiffs can oversee the harvest as well as if under your own eyes. Everyone of you has earned a visit to Rome and everyone of you shall have it, and not at some future time, which may never come, but now. I start for Rome at daybreak and the whole nine of you shall go with me!"

This unexpected liberality they heard in silence: they stood dumb and motionless.

All but Philargyrus. Gesticulating, he pressed forward among them from where he had retired to the rear after my late rebuke. Gesticulating, his voice rising into a senile scream, he upbraided me for folly, extravagance, unthrift and prodigality. He declared that such indulgence would ruin me, would debauch him and his fellows and would, by its evil example, infect, corrupt and deprave the whole countryside. He railed at me. He vowed that, whatever the rest might do, he would use all his powers of persuasion to urge them to stick to their farms till harvest was over and he swore that he himself

would, under no circumstances, leave his till the last ear of grain, the last root, the last fruit, was garnered, stored and safe for the winter.

I let him shriek himself hoarse and talk himself mute; then I spoke calmly and sternly:

"I am master here and master of all of you. The loyalty due from a free tenant is, in Sabinum, as mandatory a bond as the obedience legally due from a slave. I speak. Listen, all of you. I set out for Rome at dawn. See that every man of the nine of you is on horseback at the east courtyard gate at dawn, with an ample pack of all things needed for a month's absence properly girthed on a led mule. If any of you dare to disobey I shall find some effective means to make him smart for his temerity."

Ligo, finding his voice, thanked me for the nine, and they trudged away.

When we were back again on the dining-sofas Tanno, as was his habit, took charge of things after his breezy fashion.

"With the permission of our Caius," he said, without asking my permission, of which he was sure, "I appoint myself King of the Revels. Where's the head butler?"

When my major-domo came forward, Tanno queried:

"How much water did you mix with the wine we've been drinking with our dinner?"

The butler replied:

"Two measures of water to one of wine."

Tanno nodded to me, smiling.

"You've mighty good wine, Caius," he said. "No one is more an expert than
I and I should have conjectured three to two."
"Lads," he continued, to the guests collectively, "this is the sort of master-of-the-revels I am. I mean to start for Rome at dawn with Caius and I intend that both of us shall start cold sober. Therefore all of us must go to bed reasonably sober. You must submit to my rulings."

Then he instructed the butler:

"Give us no more of the mixture we have been drinking. Mix a big bowl three to one and ladle that out to us."

When our goblets had been filled he spoke to me!

"Caius, I want to know what that old hunks of a Chryseros Philargyrus meant when he said that after what had occurred this afternoon he was your man, body and soul. What happened?"

"Nothing much." I said. "As Agathemer and I were riding home and were passing his barn-yard gate, we heard yells for help. I dismounted and ran in. I found Chryseros rather at a disadvantage in handling a bull. I helped him get the beast into his pen. His gratitude seems exaggerated."

"Not any more exaggerated than your modesty," spoke up Neponius Pomplio, who had hardly uttered a word since he arrived. Turning to Tanno he continued:

"You'll never get Hedulio to tell you anything more definite than the very vague and hazy adumbration of his exploit he has already given. I heard some rumors of his feat as I rode down here from my house. I conjecture that the story is worth telling, to its least detail. If you want to hear what really occurred, call in Agathemer; he was with Hedulio when it happened."

"Good idea," said Tanno, "and I want Agathemer here for another reason.
May I call him in, Caius?"
I assented and Agathemer came in, as smiling and obsequious as always.

"Agathemer," Tanno queried, "have you finished your dinner?"

"Long ago," said Agathemer, "and plenty too."

"Then, have a chair," said Tanno, rolling himself luxuriously on the deep, soft mattress of one of my uncle's superlatively comfortable sofas. "No!" he said sharply. "No demurring. Sit down, man! Do as I tell you! I've a batch of questions to put to you and you'll be long answering me. I want you entirely at ease while you talk. You can't talk as I want you to unless you forget everything else. If you stand you'll be thinking of your tired legs instead of talking without thinking at all."

Agathemer, embarrassed, seated himself in the lowest and simplest chair in the room.

"We called you in for something else," said Tanno, "but first of all I want to ask you why you were not with us at dinner? Caius has written me again and again how he and you dine together evening after evening and how you are so entertaining that he enjoys a

dinner just with you almost as much as if he has novel guests. Why were you left out of this? Is Hedulio shy of more or less than nine at table, like his uncle, or does his uncle's dining-room outfit coerce him? Or what was the reason?"

Agathemer turned red and visibly writhed, mute and sweating.

I cut in.

"Here, Caius," I said to Tanno, "this isn't the torture chamber nor you the executioner, nor yet has Agathemer deserved the rack. You are putting him in an excruciating dilemma. He is too courteous to tell you that you ought to ask me, not him, and he is too loyal to tell you the reason."

I was nearer to being angry with Tanno than I had ever been in our lives. I comprehended why he, with all his superlative equipment of tact and intuition, had blundered; he could not but assume that circumstances were as they should have been rather than as they were; yet the blunder was, in a sense, unforgivable, and had created a social situation than which nothing could be more awkward.

Agathemer's face cleared as I spoke.

Tanno rounded on me.

"You tell me, then!" he said. "I guess from their faces that I have advertised my ignorance of what is perfectly well known to everybody else here. Remove my disabilities."

I hesitated and then went in with a rush.

"It does not matter a particle," I said, "how often I lie down to dinner with Agathemer when we are alone. Since I am then the only freeman in the villa there are no witnesses of our dining together. But if I have him to dinner with any guest he becomes thereby a freeman, as you very well know. And if I were free to set him free and chose to free him in that fashion, I should have to advise my friends in advance of my intentions and ask whether they were willing to lend themselves to such a proceeding. One cannot invite a man without previous explanation and then, when he's already in one's house, ask him to lie down to dinner with a slave."

"Slave!" Tanno roared at me, his face red as the back of a boiled lobster. If I had just missed being angry with him, there was no doubt that he was in a tearing fury with me.

"Slave?" he repeated. "Agathemer still a slave? Are you joking or are you serious? Is this true?"

"Entirely and literally true." I affirmed.

Tanno, so red that I should have thought it impossible that he could grow redder, grew redder.

"If your uncle," he roared, "did not free him in his will he was a hog. If you haven't freed him yourself, you're a hog. Free him here and now! Show some decency and some gratitude! Better late than never. Here, Agathemer, get off that boy's stool and lie down between me and Entedius."

"Go slow, Caius!" I admonished him. "You just confessed that you know nothing of the circumstances, yet you give orders in my house, orders affecting my property-rights, without first acquainting yourself with all the conditions on which such orders should be based, even if you had asked and received my permission to issue them."

Tanno was impulsive, even headlong, but he never wrangled or quarrelled and seldom lost his temper. I had feared a still more violent outburst from him, but my admonition brought him to himself.

"I apologize," he said, the red fading from his face. "Tell me the whole matter, so that I may comprehend. I'll listen in silence."

"The vital fact," I said, "is that, although I fully expected my uncle, in his will, to free Agathemer, he not only did not free him, but he enjoined me not to free him within five years after my entrance into my inheritance."

"Well," said Tanno, "I take back what I said of you when I called you a hog, but, even if we are taught to utter nothing but good of the dead, I repeat that your uncle was a hog. What do you think of it, Agathemer?"

Agathemer sat at ease now on his stool and his face was placid.

"Since you have asked what I think," he said, "may I assume that you accord me permission to utter what I think, as if I were even a free man?"

"Utter precisely what you think, without any reservations or modifications," said Tanno. "I want to have exactly what you think and all you think."

"I think," spoke Agathemer, "that you are neither wise to speak so of the dead nor justified in speaking so of my former master. He was a just man and a wise man. Though I cannot conjecture his reason, I am sure that what he did was, somehow, for the best."

Tanno stared at him with a puzzled expression.

He turned to me.

"Isn't it true," he queried, "that your uncle had on his hands an hereditary lawsuit of the most exasperating sort, in the course of which the other side had won the first decision and every appeal?"

"Everybody knows that, Socrates," I admitted.

"Didn't Agathemer," Tanno pressed me, "just before the case was heard in the highest court, make a suggestion which your uncle's lawyers utilized and through which they won the case?"

"That is also true," I affirmed.

"Didn't they all say, that Agathemer's suggestion was just what they should have thought of at the very first and didn't they admit that they had not thought of it until Agathemer suggested it and that they never would have thought of it if he had not suggested it?"

"Those are the facts," I confessed.

"In view of those facts," Tanno continued, "what did you yourself expect your uncle to do for Agathemer in his will?"

I ruminated.

"The very least I anticipated," I said, "was that he would free Agathemer and make him a present equal to the value of half the property in dispute in the lawsuit. As Ducconius had had to repay to my uncle the full amount of the rents paid since his family first gained possession of the property, that would have been a very moderate reward for Agathemer's service. I also conjectured that he might free Agathemer and will him a sum equivalent to the net proceeds of the repaid rents, less the costs of the suit. I should not have been surprised if he had made him a present of the whole farm out and out. Many an owner has done more for a slave who had done less for him."

"And you would have regarded it as fair if your uncle had taken any of those methods of recompensing Agathemer?"

"Certainly!" I affirmed.

"Then why, in the name of Mercury," he demanded, "didn't you free
Agathemer the moment the will was read?"
"I have told you over and over," I retorted impatiently, "that my uncle's will enjoined me not to free Agathemer within five years, though he also enjoined that I was to make a new will at once so as to leave Agathemer free and recompensed if I died before the five years elapsed."

"But the injunction was not binding," Tanno persisted, "either in law or by religious custom. No dead man can prevent his heirs freeing slaves he leaves them. Why heed the injunction?"

"I could not contravene so explicit a behest of the dead," I demurred, "especially of a man I loved and revered. And you must recall my uncle's queer habit of acting on intuitions and the way he expressed them, always saying:

"'It has been revealed to me that....' And his intuitions always seemed to amount to prevision, he never seemed to have acted amiss, however eccentric his act, however baseless his premonition. I have a feeling that in Agathemer's case he acted on some such presentiment."

Tanno turned to Agathemer.

"Do you feel that way too?" he demanded.

"I most certainly do," said Agathemer, "I have a feeling that my remaining a slave is going to be of vital service to Hedulio, somehow, sometime."

"Then you are content to remain a slave?" Tanno queried.

"No one wants to remain a slave," Agathemer confessed, "and every slave longs to be a free man and is impatient to be free at once. But I try to be resigned, of course, and, except that I cannot rejoice in not being free, I am as well fed, clothed and housed as I should be as a free man and have as much leisure."

Tanno glowered at both of us.

I cut in:

"You must remember that Agathemer was raised almost as a free man and almost as my brother. We slept and played together from the time we could walk. We had the same tutors, always, when in the country, both in Bruttium and in Sabinum. In Rome, while I was at school, Agathemer was taught the same subjects at home. We love each other almost as brothers. Both of us were amazed when grandfather left Agathemer to my Uncle instead of to my father or to me. We were more amazed at Uncle's will. But as things are between us, Agathemer not only looks forward to freedom and an estate within five years, but knows that his interval of waiting will be pleasant, as pleasant as I can make it."

"But," Tanno objected, "think of the danger he is in while a slave. For instance, just suppose—(may the gods avert the omen)—that you were murdered in your bed this very night and no clue to the murderer found. Nothing could save Agathemer from being tortured along with all your other slaves."

"Pooh!" I cried. "You are behind the times! You may be an unsurpassable expert on dress and manners, on perfumery and jewels, but you could know more law. All those ferocious old statutes have been abolished by the enactments of Antoninus and Aurelius. A slave, during good behavior, is almost as safe as a freedman."

"It is you," Tanno countered, "who are behind the times. Commodus has had rescinded every edict ameliorating the condition of slaves promulgated since the accession of Trajan. As Nerva did little for them the status of slaves is now practically what it was at the death of Domitian."

"Anyhow," spoke up Agathemer, "whatever real or fancied perils hang over me, by my late master's will and wish, a slave I am and a slave I remain till the five years elapse. Even thereafter I shall be Hedulio's devoted servitor, meanwhile I am his devoted slave."

"Does being his slave inhibit you from telling the truth about him?" Tanno queried.

"If it is to his discredit, certainly," Agathemer answered.

"Suppose it is to his credit, very much to his credit," Tanno pursued.

"Then I am permitted to tell the truth," laughed Agathemer.

"Then," said Tanno, "tell us the whole truth about Hedulio and Chryseros
Philargyrus and the bull."

Agathemer laughed out loud.

"Delighted to oblige you," he bowed. Tanno looked at me.

"Hedulio is blushing," he said, "this promises to be interesting. As king of the revels I forbid Hedulio from interrupting. Everybody drain a goblet. Boy, pour a goblet for Agathemer. Agathemer, take a good long drink, so you may start in good voice. And, boy, fill his goblet again when it gets low. Keep an eye on it. Begin, Agathemer."

"It is a shorter story than you anticipate," Agathemer began.

"Hedulio and I had completed the final inspection of the estate. We had begun each inspection with Chryseros' farm and had taken the farms in rotation, ending up with Feliger's. We had inspected Macer's farm in the morning, had had a leisurely bath, lunch and snooze and had ridden out to Feliger's. After looking over the last details of the toolsheds and henneries we were riding home under the over-arching elms down Bran Lane. As we passed Chryseros' entrance we heard yells for help. Hedulio spurred his horse up the avenue and towards the yells, I after him. The yells guided us to the lower barn-yard gate. Hedulio reined up abruptly, leaped off, leaving me to catch his mare, and vaulted the gate. I tethered our mounts as quickly as I could and climbed the gate. I saw old Chryseros pinned against the wall of his barley-barn, in between the horns of his white bull. The points of the bull's horns were driven into the wood of the barn and the horns were so long that Chryseros was in no immediate danger of being crushed between the bull's forehead and the barn wall. The bull was so enraged that he was pushing with all his might, puffing and bellowing, spraying Chryseros' legs with froth, grunting and lowing between bellows. As long as he kept on pushing Chryseros was more scared than hurt; but, sooner or later, the bull was certain to draw back, lunge, and skewer Chryseros on one or the other of his horns.

"When I first saw them Chryseros and the bull were as I have described.
Hedulio was twisting the bull's tail.
"The bull paid no more attention to the tail-twisting than if Hedulio had been in the moon.

"Hedulio shouted to Chryseros to hold tight to the bull's horns, as he was already doing, and to stand still. He let go the bull's tail and turned round. Seeing me, he ordered me to get back over the gate and to stay there. He looked about, ran to the stable door, peered in, went in and returned with a manure fork. With that in his hand he ran back to the bull and jabbed him with the fork.

"Then the bull did roar. He backed suddenly away from the barn, shaking his horns loose from the futile grip Chryseros had on them, and whirled on Hedulio. Hedulio jabbed him in the neck with the fork. The bull bellowed with rage, it seemed, more than with pain, lowered his head and charged at Hedulio.

"Hedulio side-stepped as deftly as a professional beast-fighter in an amphitheatre and to my amazement, well as I knew him, threw away the fork.

"The bull's rush carried him almost the whole breadth of the barn-yard. When he turned round he stood, pawing the ground, shaking his head and bellowing. I never saw a bull angrier-looking. He lowered his head to charge.

"But he never charged.

"Hedulio was walking toward him and the bull just stood and pawed and bellowed till Hedulio caught hold of the ring in his nose and led him off to his pen.

"Chryseros, who had dodged through the little door into the barn and had slammed it after him, had peered out of it just before Hedulio reached the bull and had stood, mouth open, hands hanging, letting the door swing wide open.

"Hedulio led the bull into the pen, patted him on the neck and then turned his back on him and sauntered out of the pen, shutting the gate without hurry.

"Chryseros ran to him, stumbling as he ran, fell on his knees, caught
Hedulio's hand, and poured out a torrent of thanks."
"Did all that really happen?" Tanno queried.

"Precisely as I have told it." Agathemer affirmed.

"Well," said Tanno, "I know why Caius did not want to tell it. He knew I'd think it an impudent lie."

"Don't you believe it?" Agathemer asked, respectfully.

"Well," Tanno drawled, "I've been watching the faces of the audience. Nobody has laughed or smiled or sneered. I'm an expert on curios and antiques and other specialties, but I am no wiser on bulls than any other city man. So I suppose I ought to believe it. But it struck me, while I listened to you, as the biggest lie I ever heard. I apologize for my incredulity."

"It would be incredible," said Juventius Muso, "if told of any one except Hedulio and it would probably be untrue. As it is told of Hedulio it is probably true and also entirely credible."

"Why of Caius any more than any one else?" queried Tanno.

Muso stared at him.

"I beg pardon," he said, "but I somehow got the idea that you were an old and close friend of our host."

"I was and am," Tanno asserted.

"And know nothing," Muso pressed him, "of his marvellous powers over animals of all kinds, even over birds and fish?"

"Never heard he had any such powers." Tanno confessed.

"How's this, Hedulio?" Juventius demanded of me.

"I suppose," I said, "that Tanno and I have mostly been together at Rome. Animals are scarcer there than in the country and human beings more plentiful. He knows more of my dealings with men and women than with other creatures."

"Besides," Tanno cut in, "you must all remember that our Caius not only never boasts but is absurdly reticent about anything he has done of such a kind that most men would brag of it. Towards his chums and cronies he is open-hearted and as unreserved as a friend could be about everything else, but especially close with them about such matters. So I know nothing of his powers concerning which you speak."

My guests cried out in amazement, all talking at once.

"I'm king of the revels," Tanno reminded them.

"Juventius was talking; let him say his say. Everyone of you shall talk his fill, I promise you. I am immensely interested and curious, as I expect to hear many things which I should have heard from Caius any time these ten years. Speak out, Juventius!"

"Before I say what I meant to say," Muso began, "I want to ask some questions. What you have just told me has amazed me and what little you have said leaves me puzzled. Surely there are dogs in Rome?"

"Plenty," Tanno assured him.

"Haven't you ever seen a vicious dog fly at Hedulio?" Muso pursued.

"Many a time," Tanno admitted.

"Did you ever see one bite him?" Muso asked.

"Never!" Tanno affirmed.

"Can you recall what happened?" queried Muso.

Tanno rubbed his chin.

"It seems to me," he said, "that every time I saw a snarling cur or an open-mouthed watch-dog rush at Caius, the dog slowed his rush before he reached him, circled about him, sniffing, and trotted back where he came from."

"Did you never see Hedulio beckon such a dog, handle and gentle him, even pet him."

"Once I did, as I now recall," Tanno confessed, "yet I thought nothing of it at the time and forgot it at once."

"Probably," Muso conjectured, "you thought the dog was only pretending to be cross and was really tame."

"Just about that, I suppose," Tanno ruminated.

"Well," said Muso, "I take it that any one of the dogs you saw run at Hedulio was affected by him just as was the bull this afternoon; each began by acting towards him as he would have towards any other man; each was cowed and tendered mild by the nearer sight of him. That is the way Hedulio affects all animals whatever."

"Tell us some cases you have seen yourself," Tanno suggested.

"I fear your skepticism, even your derision," Muso demurred.

"I haven't a trace of either left in me by now," Tanno declared. "What you say has knocked the mental wind out of me, so to speak, and I see that the others feel as you do and seem to have similar ideas to express. I vow I believe you, gentlemen, though

something inside me is still numb with amazement. Tell us, Juventius, the biggest story you know of these alleged powers of our Caius."

"I told you so," said Muso. "In spite of your disclaimers you slip in that 'alleged.' I don't like that 'alleged' of yours, Opsitius."

"That wasn't mine." Tanno laughed. "That was the numb something inside me talking in its sleep. I'm all sympathetic interest, with no admixture of unbelief. I can see you have startling anecdotes to tell. Tell the most startling."

"The most startling," Juventius began, "I most solemnly aver is literally true. Hedulio and I were once riding along a woodcutters' road through the forests on the Aemilian estate, in the wildest portion of it. The road forms a part of a good short-cut from Villa Aemilia to this valley. It was hot weather and very dry. We were both thirsty. There is a cool and abundant spring not many paces up a steep path on the left of that road. At the path we tethered our horses and walked to the spring. When we had quenched our thirst and had started down the little glade below the spring we saw the head of a big gray wolf appear among some ferns at the lower end of the glade by the path on our left. I stopped, for we had no weapons. Hedulio, however, went on, never altering his easy saunter. The wolf came out of the ferns and paced up to Hedulio like a house dog. Hedulio patted his head, pulled his ears and the wolf not only did not attack him nor snap at him, nor even snarl, but showed his pleasure as plainly as any pet dog. When Hedulio had stopped petting him, I reached them. We two went on as if we were alone, leaving the wolf standing looking after us as if he were watch-dog at the house of an intimate friend."

"Rome," said Tanno, when Muso paused, "is rated the most wonderful place on earth. Rome is my home. Rome rates Sabinum low, except for olives, wines, oaks, sheep and mules. Wonders are not named among the staple products of Sabinum. Yet I come to Sabinum for the first time and hear wonders such as I never dreamed of at Rome."

"And you are only at the beginning of such wonders," spoke up Entedius Hirnio. "That tale of Muso's is mild to one I can tell and I take oath in advance to every word of my story."

"Begin it then, in the name of Hercules," Tanno urged him. "If it is what you herald we cannot have it too quickly."

"When Hedulio and I were hardly more than boys," Hirnio began, "we bird- nested and fished and hunted and roamed the woods like any pair of country lads. Parts of our woodland hereabouts are wilder than anything on the Aemilian estate, and we liked the wildest parts best. I had an uncle at Amiternum and it happened that Hedulio's uncle

allowed him to go with me once when my father visited his brother. My uncle had a farm high up in the mountains east of Amiternum and Hedulio and I there revelled in wildness wilder than anything hereabouts. We had no fear and ranged the hillsides, ravines and pine-woods eager and unafraid.

"High up the mountains we blundered on a bear's den with two cubs in it. They were old enough to be playful and young enough not to be fierce or dangerous. I was for carrying them off, but Hedulio said that if the mother returned before we were well on our way home she would certainly catch us before we could reach a place of safety and we should certainly be killed.

"'We had better stop playing with these fascinating little brutes,' he said, 'and be as far off as possible before she comes back.'

"Just as he said it we heard twigs snapping, the crash of rent underbrush, and I looked up and saw the bear coming.

"I had never seen a wild bear till then. She looked to me as big as a half grown calf, and as fat as a six-year-old sow. She came like a race-horse. Besides my instantaneous sense of her size, weight and speed, I saw only her great red mouth, wide-open, set round with gleaming white teeth, from which came a snarl like the roar of a cataract.

"I sprang to the nearest tree which promised a refuge, caught the lowest boughs and scrambled up, the angry snarls of the bear filling my ears. As I reached the first strong branch the snarls stopped.

"I settled myself and looked down.

"The bear was standing still, some paces from her den, peering at it and snuffing the air, working her nose it seemed to me, and moving her head from side to side.

"Hedulio had not moved. He stood just where I had left him, one cub in his arms, the other cuddled at his feet.

"The bear, growling very short, almost inaudible growls, approached him slowly, moving only one foot at a time and pausing before she lifted another foot. She sniffed at the cub on the ground, sniffed at Hedulio's legs, and looked up at the cub in his arms. She made a sound more like a whine than a growl. Hedulio lowered the cub and she sniffed at it. Then Hedulio caught her by the back of the neck. She did not snarl but yielded to his pull and rolled over on her side. He picked up the cub on the ground and laid both by her nipples. They went to, nursing avidly, almost like little pigs, yet also somewhat like

puppies. Hedulio sauntered away and to my tree, beckoned me down and we strolled away as if there were no bear near: she in fact paying no attention to either of us after the cubs began nursing her."

Tanno looked wildly about.

"Boys," he said, "forgive me if I am dazed, and don't be insulted. I recall that Entedius prefaced his narrative with an oath to its veracity. I am ready to believe all this if he reaffirms it. But I have a horrible feeling that you farmers think you have caught a city ignoramus and that it is your duty to stuff me with the tallest stories you can invent. Please set me right. If you are stuffing me the joke is certainly on me, for these incredible tales seem true: if they are true the joke is doubly on me. As I am the butt, either way, don't be too hard on me: Please set me right."

They chorused at him that they had all heard the story, most of them soon after the marvel took place; that they had always believed it, and believed it then. I corroborated Hirnio's exactitude as to all the details.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER IV
HOROSCOPES AND MARVELS

Tanno looked about again, less wildly, but still like a man in a daze.

"But," he cried, "if you do such wonders, how do you do them, Caius?"

"I don't know now," I said, "any more than I knew the first time I gentled a fierce strange dog. It came natural then, it always has come natural."

"Naturally," said Lisius Naepor, "since it is part of your nature from before birth. Do you mean to tell us, Opsitius, that Hedulio has never shown you his horoscope?"

"Never!" said Tanno, "and he never spoke of it to me. I'm Spanish, you know, by ancestry, and Spaniards are not Syrians or Egyptians. Horoscopes don't figure largely in Spanish life. I never bothered about horoscopes, I suppose. So I never mentioned horoscopes to Hedulio nor he to me."

"Nor he to you of course," said Neponius Pomplio, "he is too modest."

"In fact," said Naepor. "I should never have known of Hedulio's horoscope if his uncle had not shown me a copy. Caius has never mentioned it, unless one of us talked of it first."

"What's the point of the horoscope?" Tanno queried.

"Why you see," Naepor explained. "Hedulio was born in the third watch of the night on the Ides of September.

"Now it is well known that persons are likely to be competent trainers of animals if they are born under the influence of the Whale or of the Centaur or the Lion or the Scorpion or when the Lesser Bear rises at dawn or in those watches of the night when the Great Bear, after swinging low in the northern sky, is again beginning to swing upwards, or at those hours of the day when, as it can be established by calculations, the Great Bear, though invisible in the glow of the sunlight, is in that part of its circle round the northern pole.

"It is disputed which of these constellations has the most powerful influence, but it is generally reckoned that the Whale is most influential, next the Centaur, next the Lion, and the Scorpion least of all, while the dawn rising of the Lesser Bear and the beginning of the upward motion of the Great Bear are held to have merely auxiliary influence when the other signs are favorable. If two or more of these are at one and the same time powerful in the sky at the moment of any one's birth, he will be an unusually capable animal-tamer, the more puissant according as more of the potent stars shine upon his birth.

"It is manifest that, at no day and hour, will all of these signs conspire at their greatest potency. For clearly, for instance, the Lion and the Scorpion, being both in the Zodiac, and being separated in the Zodiac by the interposition of two entire constellations, can never be in the ascendant at one and the same time, nor can one be near the ascendant when the other is in that position. Yet there are times when a majority of them all exert their most potent or nearly their most potent influence, there are some moments when their possible combination of influences is nearly at its maximum potency.

"Now the day, hour, and moment of Hedulio's birth is, as astrologers agree, precisely that instant of the entire year when the stars combine their magic powers with their most puissant force to produce their greatest possible effect on the nature of a child born at that instant, in order that he may have irresistible sway over the wills of all fierce, wild and ferocious animals.

"Such, from his birth and by the divine might of his birth-stars, is our
Hedulio."
"After all that," said Tanno, "I should believe anything. I believe the tale of the she-bear. Who has another to tell?"

"Before anyone begins another anecdote," said Neponius Pomplio, "I want to state my opinion that Hedulio's habitual and instantaneous subjugation of vicious dogs which have never before set eyes on him and his miraculous powers of similarly pacifying such wild animals as bears and wolves, while inexpressibly marvellous, is no more wonderful, if, in fact, as wondrous as his power to attract to him, even from a great distance, creatures naturally solitary, or timorous."

"It is strange," said Juventius Muso, "that I should have begun by telling the story of the wolf at the spring, an occurrence of which I was the only witness, instead of mentioning first Hedulio's power over deer, something known to all of us, and many miracles which everyone of us has seen. I suppose we each thought of the most spectacular example of Hedulio's powers known to us, whereas he had so generally handled and gentled deer that we instinctively regarded that as commonplace."

"I think you are right," said Lisius Naepor, "for Hedulio's ability to approach a doe with fawns and to handle the young in sight of the mother without her showing any sign of alarm or concern, is, to my mind, quite as marvellous as his dealings with the she-bear. It seems to me as miraculous to overcome the timidity of the doe as the ferocity of the bear. And we have all seen him play with fawns, fawns so young that they had barely begun to follow their dam. We have all seen a herd of deer stand placidly and let him approach them, move about among them, handle them. We have all seen him handle and gentle stags, even old stags in the rutting season. There is no gainsaying our Hedulio's power over animals, it is a matter of too general and too common knowledge."

"I have seen a mole," said Fisevius Rusco, "come out of its burrow at dusk and eat earth worms out of Hedulio's hand."

"I," said Naepor, "have watched him catch a butterfly and, holding it uncrushed, walk into a wood, and have seen a woodthrush flutter down to him, take the butterfly from his fingers, speed away with it to feed its young and presently return to his empty hand, as if expecting another insect, perch on his hand, peck at it and remain some time; and there is no song-bird more fearful of mankind, more aloof, more retiring, more secret than a wood-thrush."

Several of the others told of my similarly attracting seed-eating birds with handfuls of millet, wheat or other grains or seeds; of squirrels, anywhere in the forests, coming down trees to me and taking nuts from my fingers.

Bultius Seclator said:

"I have seen Hedulio seat himself on a rock in the sunshine and seen a golden eagle, circling in the sky, circle lower and lower till he perched on Hedulio's wrist and not only perched there, but sat there some time, preening his feathers as if alone on the dead topmost limb of a tall tree, eye Hedulio's face without pecking at him and finally take wing and leave Hedulio's arm not only untorn by his talons, but unscratched, without even a mark of the claw-points."

Said Mallius Vulso:

"Hedulio has a way of catching flies with a quick sweep of his hand. I have seen him catch a fly and hold him, buzzing between his fingers and thumb and have seen a lizard run up to him and dart at the fly."

"And I," said Lisius Naepor, "have seen fish in a tank rise to his hand and let him take them out of the water, handle them and slip them back into the water again, all without a struggle."

"More wonderful than that," spoke up Juventius Muso, "I have seen lampreys feed from his hand without biting it, and I have even seen him pick up lampreys out of the water without their attempting to bite him. I'll wager no other man ever did the like."

"True," ruminated Naepor, "Hedulio can pick up and handle a puff-adder and it will never strike at him and he can similarly handle any kind of snake."

"Well," Tanno summed up, after they had talked the subject out, "you countrymen beat me. Here I've been cronying with Caius for years and years and never suspected any such wizardry in him."

"May I speak?" asked Agathemer from his stool, where he had sat silent, sipping his wine very moderately at infrequent intervals.

"Certainly, man," said Tanno, "speak up if you have anything to tell as good as the bull story."

"Although I know my master's modesty." Agathemer said, "I cannot conceive how you can have associated with him so long without knowing of his power over animals. Have you never seen him, for instance, with Nemestronia's leopard?"

"Never that I recall," said Tanno, "and if I had I should have thought nothing of it. Nemestronia's leopard has been tame since it learned to suck milk from Nemestronia's fingers, before its eyes were half open. It always has been tame and is tame with everybody, not only with all Nemestronia's household, not only with frequenters of her reception rooms, but also with casual visitors, total strangers to it. Nobody would think it anything wonderful for Hedulio to handle Nemestronia's leopard."

"I do not mean merely handling," said Agathemer respectfully. "I mean something quite amazing in itself. And that leads me to remark that none of you gentlemen has mentioned or referred to what I regard as one of my master's most amazing feats and one which he has repeated countless times in the presence of uncountable witnesses: I mean taking a bone away from a vicious dog which has never seen him before. I think that amounts to a portent, or would if it had not happened so often."

"Incredible!" cried Tanno.

Then the whole room broke into a hubbub of confirmations and corroborations of Agathemer's statement.

"I give in," Tanno declared, "now for the leopard."

"I am told," said Agathemer, "that all such animals, lions, tigers, leopards, panthers and lynxes, when they set out on their nocturnal prowlings, intent on catching prey, have the strange habit of giving notice to all creatures within hearing that they are about to begin hunting, by a series of roars, snarls, squalls, screams, screeches or whatever they may be properly called for each variety of animal.

"Now one of the tricks of Nemestronia's leopard, which she is fond of exhibiting to her guests, is its method of approaching any live creature exposed to its mercy for its food. If a kid, hare, lamb, porker or what not is turned into one of Nemestronia's walled gardens and the leopard let in, she will, at first sight of the game, crouch belly-flat on the ground and give out a really appalling series of screams or whatever they should be called, entirely unlike any other noise she ever makes. Her hunting- squall, as Nemestronia calls it, rises and falls like a tune on an organ, and besides changing from shriller to less shrill alters in volume from louder to less loud and louder again. It is an experience to hear it, for it is like no sound anyone in Rome ever heard and is unforgettable."

"There you are wrong," Tanno cut in, "it is the normal hunting cry of a leopard. But not many leopards in captivity ever give it. She is the only leopard I ever heard give it in captivity, but I have heard it in the deserts south of Gaetulia and Africa, when I was there with my cohort, while I was still in the army. And let me tell you right here, what I have often told Nemestronia, only the dear self-willed old lady will not listen to me at all, there will be trouble yet with that leopard. She has been a parlor and bedroom pet from birth and she is tame, not only to all Nemestronia's household but to all visitors. But the mere fact that she is old enough to give her hunting-squall for small game is warning enough, if Nemestronia would only realize it, that she is getting fiercer as she gets older. It's only a question of time, no matter how liberally she is fed, that she will turn on her human associates. Possibly she'll give them warning with her hunting-squall, and precious little help it will be towards escaping her, but most likely she'll just turn on someone, without warning, and there'll be a corpse and a pool of blood on the floor or pavement. You mark my words: that is coming as sure as fate, if Nemestronia keeps that leopard about her mansion."

"That may all be true," Hirnio cut in, "but Opsitius, do let Agathemer say his say, whatever it may be."

"You are right and I was wrong," Tanno admitted.

"Proceed, Agathemer."

"Let me describe her behavior fully, for the sake of others," Agathemer resumed. "When she sights a victim she flattens herself out on the ground and gives her long, quavering squall. If the victim remains stationary she crawls toward it very slowly, almost imperceptibly, moving one paw only at a time. If it runs about she ceases her advance and pivots around until it is again stationary and she facing it. She keeps that up until she is within springing distance. But if she sees it near a gate or a door and apparently trying to escape through that, she springs and bounds on it. Otherwise, if the victim keeps quiet and still, she spends a long time in her approach, seeming to enjoy every breath she draws and to be gloating over her helpless prey."

"Just so, gentlemen," Tanno put in, "Agathemer is exact. I have seen all that over and over."

"It is the more astonishing to me," Agathemer went on, "that you have never seen Hedulio divert her attention and entice her away from her victim, even when she is within leaping distance and ready for her final spring. That, to me, is the only thing I ever saw Hedulio do surpassing his repeated success in taking a bone from a cross dog without resistance from the dog."

"Never saw him do it," Tanno declared. "Never heard of it from Nemestronia, and she'll talk 'leopard' by the hour, if you let her. Never suspected any such sorcery from Hedulio. How does he do it? Expound his methods."

"Very simple," said Agathemer. "He calls to her or he walks in front of her. At once she turns her attention to him, appears to forget her prey altogether, rubs against him, purrs, lets him chafe her ears, head and neck, seems to beg for more chafing, rolls on the ground by him and invites him to play with her. Sometimes she seems to insist on his playing with her and to threaten to lose her temper unless he does play with her."

"What do you mean by playing with her?" Tanno queried.

"Have you ever seen any of these little Egyptian cats which some folks have nowadays for pets?" Agathemer asked in his turn. "Creatures about as long as your forearm and rather gentle?"

"Certainly," said Tanno. "I've seen a number of them at ultra-fashionable mansions of the fast set, who must have the latest novelty."

"Ever see any of their kittens?" Agathemer asked.

"Two or three times I have," Tanno replied. "Amusing, fluffy little creatures, not much bigger than a man's hand."

"Ever see one play with a ball?" Agathemer asked.

Tanno laughed.

"Run after a ball, you mean," he said, "slap it first with one paw and then with the other, bound after it and all that?"

"No," said Agathemer, "I do not mean that way; I mean the way a kitten will pretend that a ball is another kitten, will lie on the floor with the ball between its paws, will kick it with its hind feet and paw at it with its forefeet and yet not really claw it."

"I've seen that, too," said Tanno.

"Well," said Agathemer, "Hedulio acts as the ball or the other kitten for that big leopard. He lies down on the pavement by her and they tussle like two puppies, only it is cat-play not dog-play. Hedulio kicks and slaps the leopard and she kicks and slaps him, and they are all mixed up like a pair of wrestlers, and she growls and mouths his hands and arms and shoulders, yet she never bites or claws him, does all that clawing of him with her claws sheathed; never hurts him, and, when she has had enough play, lets him lead her off to her cage."

"Miraculous!" cried Tanno, "but beastly undignified. Fancy a Roman, of equestrian rank, moving in Rome's best society circles, a friend of the Emperor, sprawling on a pavement playing with a stinking leopard, letting her tousle him and rumple his clothes, and letting her slobber her foul saliva all over his arms and shoulders! I'm ashamed of you, Hedulio!"

"Nothing to be ashamed of!" I said. "I thought it fun, every time I have done it, and I did it only for Nemestronia and a few of her intimates, never before any large gathering."

"I should hope not!" Tanno cried, "and I trust you will never try it again. It's disgraceful! And it's too risky. If you keep it up some fine day she'll slash the face off you or bite your whole head off at one snap."

I was surprised and abashed at Tanno's reception of the leopard story and Agathemer seemed similarly affected and more so than I. He tried to start a diversion.

"Most marvellous of all Hedulio's exploits," he said, "I account his encounter with the piebald horse."

"Tell us about it," said Tanno. "Horse-training is, at least, and always, an activity fit for a gentleman and wholly decent and respectable."

"It happened last year," said Agathemer, "in the autumn, before Andivius died; in fact, before we had any reason to dread that the end of his life was near. Entedius saw it, perhaps he would be a more suitable narrator than I."

"Go on," said Hirnio, "I'd rather listen to you than talk myself."

Agathemer resumed.

"We were at Reate Fair. You know how such festivals are always attended by horse-dealers and all sorts of such cheats and mountebanks. There was a plausible and ingratiating horse-dealer with some good horses. Entedius bought one and has it yet."

"And no complaints to make," said Hirnio, "the brute was as represented and has given satisfaction in every way."

"Some others in our party bought horses of him also." Agathemer continued. "Later, when the sports were on, he brought out a tall, long-barrelled piebald horse, rather a well-shaped beast, and one which would have been handsome had he been cream or bay. He showed off his paces and then offered him as a free gift to anyone who could stick on him without a fall. Several farm-lads tried and he threw them by simple buckings and rearings. Some more experienced horse-wranglers tried, but he threw one after the other.

"Then there came forward Blaesus Agellus, the best horse-master about Reate. He had watched till he thought he knew all the young stallion's tricks. No kicking, rearing or bucking could unseat him and the beast tried several unusual and bizarre contortions. Blaesus stuck on. Then the horse-dealer seemed to give a signal, as the horse cantered tamely round the ring.

"Instantly the horse, without any motion which gave warning of what he was about to do, threw himself sideways flat on the ground.

"Blaesus was stunned and his right leg badly bruised, though not broken.

"The owner gloried in his treasure and boasted of his control over the horse, even at a distance.

"Then Hedulio came forward. The crowd was visibly amazed to see a young nobleman put himself on a level with the commonality. But they all knew Hedulio's affable ways and there were no hoots or jeers.

"Hedulio examined the horse carefully, fetlocks, hoofs, mouth and all. Then he gentled and patted it. When he vaulted into the saddle, the brute did a little rearing, kicking and bucking, but soon quieted.

"Hedulio trotted him round the ring, calling to the owner:

"I dare you to try all your signals.'

"The owner seemed to try, at first far back in the crowd, so confident was he of his control of the horse, then nearer, then standing in the front row of spectators.

"The horse remained quiet.

"So Hedulio rode him home and all at the villa acclaimed the horse a great prize.

"The marvel was that he was only a two-year-old, as all experts agreed. I have seen many trick horses, but seldom a good trick horse under eight years old and never a well-trained trick horse under four years old. This was barely two."

"Is he still in your stables?" Tanno asked.

"Let Agathemer finish his tale," I replied.

"Two mornings afterward," Agathemer summed up, "we found the stable was broken into and the young stallion gone. No other horse had been stolen."

"Just what might have been expected," said Tanno, "and now, as king of the revels, I pronounce this symposium at an end. I mean to be up by dawn and to get Hedulio up soon after I am awake. I mean to start back for Rome with him as soon after dawn as I can arrange. You other gentlemen can sleep as late as you like, of course."

"I'm going with you," Hirnio cut in. "I came prepared, with my servant and led-mule loaded with my outfit. I'm to be up as soon as you two."

"Let's all turn in," Tanno proposed.

Mallius Vulso and Neponius Pomplio, who lived nearest me, declared their intention of riding home in the moon-light. The others discussed whether they should also go home or sleep in the rooms ready for them. I urged them to stay, but finally, they all decided to ride home.

Agathemer went to give orders for their horses to be brought round.

"By the way, Caius," Tanno asked, "how are you going to travel?"

"On horseback," I replied.

"Why not in your carriage?" he queried. "I was hoping to ride with you to the Via Salaria, at least, unless your roads jolt a carriage as badly as bearers on them jolt a litter. What's wrong with the superperfect travelling carriage of your late Uncle?"

"I have lent it," I explained, "to Marcus Martius, to travel to Rome in with his bride. I wrote you of his wedding. He has just married my uncle's freedwoman Marcia. I wrote you about it."

"Pooh!" cried Tanno, "how should I remember the marriage of a freedwoman I never saw with a bumpkin I never heard of?"

"No bumpkin," cut in Lisius Naepor. "Not any more of a bumpkin than I or any of the rest of us here. You are too high and mighty, Opsitius. It is true that in our countryside the only senators are Aemilius, Vedius and Satronius, and that in our immediate vicinity Hirnio and Hedulio are the only proprietors of equestrian rank but we commoners here are no bumpkins or clodhoppers."

"I apologize," Tanno spoke conciliatingly. "You are right to call me down. We Romans of Rome really know the worth of farmers and provincials and the like. But we are so used, among ourselves, to thinking of Rome as the whole world, that our speech belies our esteem for our equals. I should not have spoken so. Who is Marcus Martius, Caius, and who is Marcia?"

"Marcus Martius," I said, "is a local landowner like the rest of us. He would have been here to-night but for his recent marriage and approaching journey to Rome. I have always asked him to my dinners."

"Then how, in the name of Ops Consiva," cried Tanno, "did he come to marry your uncle's freedwoman?"

"This time I agree with you, Opsitius," said Naepor. "Your tone of scorn is wholly justified. Marrying freedwomen is getting far too common. If things go on this way there will be no Roman nobility nor gentry nor even any Roman commonality; just a wish-wash of counterfeit Romans, nine-tenths foreign in ancestry, with just enough of a dash of Roman blood to bequeath them our weaknesses and vices."

"On the other hand," said Juventius Muso, "while agreeing with Naepor as to the propriety of the tone, I object to the question. Instead of asking how Martius came to marry Marcia, had you been acquainted with the recent past history of this neighborhood, Opsitius, you would have asked how most of the rest of us managed to escape marrying her."

"A freedwoman!" cried Tanno.

"A most unusual freedwoman," Hirnio asserted, "as she was almost a portent as a slave-girl. Haven't you ever heard of her, Opsitius?"

"We Romans," Tanno bantered, "are lamentably ignorant on the life- histories of brood-sows, slave-girls, prize-heifers and such-like notabilities of Sabinum."

"She is no Sabine," Hirnio retorted, "but, as far as the locality of her birth and upbringing goes, is as Roman as you are. Did you never hear of Ummidius Quadratus?"

"Hush!" Tanno breathed. "I have heard of the man you have named, heard of him on the deaf side of my head, as did all Rome. But, in the name of Minerva, do not utter his name. It is best forgotten. Even so long after his execution and so far from Rome, the mention of the name of anyone implicated as he was might have most unfortunate results."

"Not here and among us," Hirnio declared. "The point is that Quadratus had a eunuch less worthless than most eunuchs. He became a very clever surgeon and physician, and endeared himself to Quadratus by many cures among his countless slaves, and even among his kin. Quadratus made him his chief physician and trusted him utterly. Naturally he let him set up an establishment of his own, allowing him to select a location. Hyacinthus, for that is the eunuch's name, instead of choosing for a home any one of a dozen desirable neighborhoods well within his means with the liberal allowance Quadratus gave him, settled in a peculiarly vile slum, because, as he said, his associates mostly lived there; meaning by his associates the votaries of some sort of Syrian cult,

chiefly peddlers and such, living like ants or maggots, all packed together in the rookeries of that quarter.

"Hyacinthus was not only a member of their sect, but their hierophant, or whatever they call it, and presided at the ceremonies of their religion at their little temple somewhere in the same part of the city.

"He divided his energies between his calling of surgeon, at which he prospered amazingly, and his avocation of hierophant.

"As head of their cult it fell to him to care for the orphans of their poorer families and for foundlings, for such Asiatics never expose infants or fail to succor exposed infants.

"Marcia was a foundling and brought up by Hyacinthus, therefore, legally a slave of Quadratus.

"Quadratus saw her and took a fancy to her. He had her taught not only dancing, music and such accomplishments, but had her educated almost as if she had been his niece or daughter.

"When she was yet but a half-grown girl, she had acquired such a hold on him that he used to bewail it. What was it he said, Hedulio?"

"I have heard him say to my uncle," I said, "that Marcia was as imperious as if she were Empress and that living with her was as bad as being married. Quadratus was born to be a bachelor and never thought of matrimony. But though he had solaced himself with a long series of beauties in all previous cases his word had been law and not one of his concubines had had any will of her own. Marcia's word was law to him, even her tone or look. She had wheedled him into lavishing on her flowers, perfumery, jewels, an incredibly varied and costly wardrobe, maids, masseuses, bathgirls, a mob of waiters, cooks, doorkeepers, litter-bearers and what not and the most costly equipages.

"He groaned, but was too infatuated to deny her anything.

"My uncle sympathized with him and, with the idea of disabusing him of his folly, somehow, while visiting him, saw Marcia.

"Uncle at once fell madly in love with her.

"He offered to buy her.

"That was just before Quadratus became involved in the intrigues radiating from Lucilla's conspiracy, was implicated in the conspiracy itself and so disgraced and executed.

"Marcia seems to have had some prevision or inkling of what was coming. Anyhow she could not have acted more for her own interest if she had had accurate information of what was impending. She cajoled Uncle into buying her and coaxed Quadratus into selling her.

"'Take her,' Quadratus told him, 'at your own price. If you don't or if somebody else don't free me from this vampire, I'll be fool enough to manumit her and marry her as soon as she is free!'

"Uncle brought her up here.

"Did she wail at leaving Rome and mourn over seclusion in our hills? Not she.

"She made as big a fool of Uncle as she had of Quadratus.

"He, with his ill health and his frequent illnesses, got as much satisfaction out of Marcia as a blind man would get from a painting. But he indulged her far beyond his means. He gave her the little west villa for her home, and a small horde of servants. She wheedled him into freeing her and then, from the day she was freed, set herself to marry and marry well. She had every bachelor and widower hereabouts visiting her, dangling about her, competing for her smiles, showering gifts on her, soliciting her favor!

"When they found, one by one, that the only road to her favors was by matrimony, they sheered off in terror, one by one.

"She nearly married Vedius Caspo, came almost as near with Satronius
Sabinus.
"Then, when she saw no hope left of a senator, she almost landed Hirnio, tried to marry Uncle, and tried to marry me."

"And just missed all three," said Hirnio, fervently. "I am still equally congratulating myself on my escape and wondering over it. I was sure Andivius would marry her, sure of it until his last illness made it impossible. And I feared for our Hedulio here.

"The only man hereabouts whom she did not try to marry was Ducconius Furfur. She had made eyes at his father, and Ducconius was precious afraid she would be his stepmother. At first he railed at her. Then, just before his father's death, it was manifest

to everybody that he was yielding to her fascinations, himself. Hardly was old Ducconius buried when young Furfur lost his head completely and fell madly in love with Marcia. She could have married him easily; in fact, he offered marriage, not only to her in private, but before witnesses. She, for some reason, would not hear of marrying him. In fact, Furfur, it seems, was the only bachelor hereabouts whom she was unwilling to marry. She flouted him, derided him, and finally forbade him her house and ordered him never to dare to approach her. He kept away, sulky and morose and low-spirited.

"After that episode she had a go at Muso, the only other bachelor among us seven.

"Finally she fastened on Marcus Martius, who is not quite as rich as Muso, but yet comfortably well off. She married him day before yesterday."

"Thanks be to Hercules," Tanno cried, "that I have never set eyes on the jade. I'm for matrimony only with an heiress of my own class and only with such an heiress as I personally fancy. No matrimony for me otherwise."

With this the party broke up. We all went out on the terrace. My six neighbors mounted and cantered off on their various roads home; Tanno, Hirnio and I went in and to bed.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER V
ENCOUNTERS

Next morning I was wakened by a dash of cold water over me and sat up in bed dripping and angry. Tanno was bending over me.

"I had to souse you," he explained. "I've been shaking you and yelling at you and you stayed as fast asleep as before I touched you. Get up and let's start for Rome."

We enjoyed a brief rubdown and after Entedius joined us each relished a small cup of mulled wine and one of Ofatulena's delicious little hot, crisp rolls.

In the east courtyard we found our equipages and I descried my tenants outside the gate, all horsed and each muffled in a close rain-cloak, topped off by a big umbrella hat, its wide brim dripping all round its edge, for the weather was atrocious; foggy mist blanketing all the world under a gray sky from which descended a thin, chilly drizzle.

Hirnio was inspecting Tanno's litter and chatting with Tanno about it.

"Never saw one with poles like this," he said. "All I have seen had one long pole on each side, a continuous bar of wood from end to end. What's the idea of four poles, half poles you might call them, two on a side?"

"You see," Tanno explained, "It is far harder to get sound, flawless, perfect poles full length. Then, too, full-length spare poles are very bothersome and inconvenient to carry. With a litter equipped in this fashion one man can carry a spare pole, and they are much easier and quicker to put in if a pole snaps."

"I should think," Hirnio remarked, "that the half-poles would pull out of the sockets."

"Not a bit," said Tanno, "they clamp in at the end, this way. See? The clamps fasten instantly and release at a touch, but hold tenaciously when shut."

Under the arcade my household had gathered to say farewell and wish me good luck. I spoke briefly to each and thanked Ofatulena for her distinguished cookery, both in respect to the credit her masterpieces had done me at dinner and also for the taste of her rolls, which yet lingered in mouth and memory. Tanno also expressed his admiration of her powers.

Last I said farewell to my old nurse and foster mother Uturia, who, when I was scarcely a year old, had closed the eyes of my dying mother, and not much later of my father, and who had not merely suckled me, but had been almost as my real mother to me in my childhood.

She could not keep back her tears, as always at our partings; the more as she had had dreams the night before and she took her dreams very seriously.

"Deary," she sobbed, "it has been revealed to me that you go into great perils when you set out to-day. I saw danger all about you, danger from men and danger from beasts. Beware of strangers, of narrow streets, of walled gardens, of plots, of secret conferences. All these threaten you especially."

I kissed her as heartily as if she had been my own mother.

"Don't worry, Uturia," I said, "as long as I live I'll take care of you and if I die you shall be a free woman with a cottage and garden and three slaves of your own."

But she only sobbed harder, both as she clung to me and after I had mounted.

Tanno, of course, rolled into his litter and slid the panels against the rain. His bearers were muffled up precisely like my tenants. So was Tanno's intendant, so was Hirnio, so was I. The entire caravan was a mere column of horses, cloaks and hats, not a man visible, all the faces hid under the flapping hat-brims, no man recognizable.

Hirnio and I led, next came Tanno in his litter, then his extra bearers, next his intendant on horseback, then my nine tenants, each horsed and leading a pack-mule, last the mounted servants, Tanno's, Hirnio's and mine, similarly leading pack-mules, in all twenty-seven men afoot, sixteen mounted and twelve led mules.

As we strung out Tanno called to me:

"Luck for us if we don't blunder into one of those ambushes we heard about at dinner last night. With all this cavalcade everybody we meet cannot fail to conjecture that so large a party can only be from either Villa Vedia or Villa Satronia, such an escort misbefits anyone not of senatorial rank. If we do blunder into an ambush either side will know we are not their men and will assume we are of the other party. No one can recognize anybody in this wet-weather rig. Any ambush will attack first and investigate afterwards or not at all."

Had I heeded his chance words I might, even then, have saved myself. But while my ears heard him my wits were deaf. I called back:

"There are no ambushes. Each side spreads such rumors to discredit the other, but neither so much as thinks of ambush. If Xantha or Greia is located, the clan concerned for her freedom will gather a rescue-party and there may be fight over her, but there are no ambushes."

At the foot of my road Hirnio and I turned to our left. Tanno from his litter emitted a howl of protest.

"Nothing," he yelled, "will induce me to traverse that road again. I told you so. You promised to take the other road. What do you mean?"

"Don't worry, Opsitius," Hirnio reassured him. "We turned instinctively according to habit. You shall have your way. It is not much farther by the other road."

"Anyhow," I added, "Martius is not in sight. He was to have been here before us. If we went this way we should have to wait for him. If we go the other we shall most likely meet him at the fork of the road."

We turned to our right towards Villa Vedia and Vediamnum. About half way to the entrance to Villa Vedia, at the top of the hill between the two bridges, the rain for a brief interval fairly cascaded from the sky. During this temporary downpour, as we splashed along, we saw loom out of the rain, fog and mist the outline of what might have been an equestrian statue, but which, as we drew up to it, we found a horse and rider, stationary and motionless to the south of the road, on a tiny knoll, facing the road and so close to it that I might have put out my right hand and touched the horse's nose as we passed.

Like everyone in our convoy the rider was enveloped in a rain-cloak and his head and face hidden under a wide-brimmed umbrella hat. He saluted as I came abreast of him, but his salutation was merely a perfunctory wave of a hand, an all-but-imperceptible nod and an inarticulate grunt.

I barely caught a glimpse of his face, but I made sure he was no one I had ever seen before and equally sure that he was not a Sabine.

When we reached the entrance of Villa Vedia, which was also the crossroad down which Marcus Martius and his bride must come, there was no sign of a travelling carriage, nor any fresh ruts in the road.

We halted and peered into the mist. Nothing was in sight on the road, but there was a stir in the bushes by the roadside. Out of them appeared a bare head, with a shock of tousled, matted, rain-soaked gray hair, a hatchet face, brow like a bare skull, bleared eyes, far apart and deepset on either side of a sharp hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey, high cheekbones under the thin, dry, tight-drawn skin above the sunken cheeks, a wide, thin-lipped mouth and a chin like a ship's prow. The rain trickled down the face.

Up it rose, till there was visible under it a lean stringy neck, a tattered garment, and the outline of a gaunt, emaciated body, that of a tall, spare, half-starved old woman.

I recognized the Aemilian Sibyl, as all the countryside called her, an old crone who had, since before the memory of our oldest patriarchs, lived in a cave in the woods on the Aemilian Estate, supported by the gifts doled out to her by the kindness, respect or fear of the slaves and peasantry living nearest her abode, for she had a local reputation for magical powers in the way of spells to cure or curse, charms for wealth or health, love philtres, fortune-telling, prophecy and good advice on all subjects likely to cause uncertainty of mind in farm-life.

She towered out of the dripping shrubberies and pointed a long skinny finger at me.

"I know you under your cloak and hat, Hedulio," she wheezed. "Well for you if younger folk than I had such, eyes in their heads as I have in my spirit. I know you, Andivius Hedulio. You turn your face towards Reate, but you shall never see Reate this day. You might as well take the road to Rome and be done with it, for to Rome you shall go, whether you will or not. Whether you will or not, whatever road your feet take, you will find it leads you to Rome, whatever ship you take, no matter to what port she steers, will land you at Rome's Wharf. They say all roads lead to Rome. For you, in truth, every road leads to Rome, whether you face towards Rome or away from Rome.

"Be warned! Yield to your fate! If you would have luck, go to Rome, abide in Rome; and if you must leave Rome, return to Rome.

"And hearken to my words, let them sink deep into your mind, remember them and heed them; beware of a man with a hooked nose, beware of secret conferences, beware of plots, walled gardens, beware of narrow streets, for these will be your undoing."

Agathemer had edged his horse along the roadside the length of our cavalcade and had joined me. He dismounted, strode to the hag and held out his hand to her, some silver pieces on its palm, saying:

"My master thanks you for your warning and offers you these as a guerdon."

"Greek!" she screamed. "I warn not for guerdons, but at the behest of the God of Prophecy. Begone with your silver! Silver I scorn and gold and all the treasures of mankind's folly and all the joys of mankind's life. I am the Sibyl!"

And she tramped off through the crackling underbrush till the trees hid her and the noise of her going died away, till she was so far off that we heard the rain drops drip from the boughs and the horses fret at their bits.

So at a standstill, as we stared expectantly up the crossroad, we saw come into sight, not a travelling carriage, but a horseman, looming huge out of the fog, a vast bulk of a man on a big black horse like a farm work-horse.

He drew rein and saluted civilly, tilting up his hat. His face was ruddy, his eyes blue, his expression that of a mountaineer from a village or small town.

"I have lost my way," he said. "My name is Murmex Lucro. I come from Nersae and am bound for Rome. I was told of a short cut that should have brought me out on the Salarian Road near Trebula. But I must have taken a wrong turn, for I was wholly at a loss at dusk yesterday and so camped in the woods by a spring. I have not met a human being since daylight. Where am I and how can I reach the Via Salaria?"

"You are not far from it," Hirnio told him. "We are bound for Rome and if you join us you can reach Via Salaria with us by the road on which we are going. Should you prefer to follow the road along which we have come, which is rough, but less roundabout, you can, by taking every turn to the right, reach the Via Salaria some miles nearer Rome than where our road will bring us out on it."

"I'll join your cavalcade, if you have no objection," the stranger said.

Hirnio and I expressed our entire willingness to have his company.

Hirnio asked him:

"Are you in any way related to Murmex Frugi?"

"He was my father," Murmex replied, simply.

"Was!" Hirnio repeated. "The word strikes ominously on my ear. Someone from this neighborhood, I forget who, was in Nersae since the roads became fit for travelling this spring and returned from there, or perhaps some wayfarer from Nersae stopped with

someone hereabouts. At any rate we heard he had seen Murmex Frugi still hale and sound, even at his advanced age."

"My father," said Murmex, "was still hale and sound on the Kalends of May and for a day or two thereafter. He fell ill with a cough and fever, and died after only two nights' illness, on the Nones of May, barely more than a month ago."

"He lived to a green old age," said Hirnio, "and must have enjoyed every moment of his life."

"He seemed to," said Murmex.

"And I conjecture," I put in, "that he was proud of his son."

"He seemed so," Murmex admitted, "but he was never a tenth as proud of me as I of him."

"It is an honor," I said, "to be the son of the greatest gladiator of our fathers' days, of the man esteemed the best swordsman Italy ever saw live out his term of service and live to retire on his savings."

"It is," Murmex said, as simply as before.

Here we were interrupted by a yell from Tanno, as he leaned out of his litter.

"Are we going to take root here," he bawled, "like Phaethon's sisters? We were supposed to be journeying to Rome. We appear to be bound for Hades; we shall certainly reach it if we continue sinking into your Sabine mud!"

"Martius agreed to wait for me, if I was late," I shouted back to him. "I agreed to wait for him; I keep my word. If you choose, we'll get out of your way and let you pass on. We can catch up with you."

"Bah!" he roared. "No going it alone on a Sabine road for me! I'm tied to you hand and foot. But this waiting in the rain is no fun! Did you notice that man on horseback we passed on the road?"

"I did," I called back.

"Do you know who he is?"

"Never set eyes on him before," I replied.

"Do you know what he is?"

"No," I answered, "I do not. What is he, according to your conjecture?"

"I'm not depending on any conjectures," Tanno bellowed, "I know to a certainty."

"Then tell us," I called.

"Not here!" cried Tanno. "I'll tell you later."

He pulled his head inside his litter.

We again stared up the crossroad. Nothing was in sight.

"It seems to me," Hirnio again addressed Murmex, "that not only your father was a Nersian, but also Pacideianus and that I have heard that he also was living in retirement at Nersae."

"He is yet," rejoined Murmex, laconically.

"Then you know him?" Hirnio queried.

"My mother," said Murmex, "is his sister."

"Your uncle!" cried Hirnio, "son to one of the two greatest retired gladiators in Italy, nephew to the other! Living in the same town with them! Did either of them ever teach you anything of sword play?"

"Both of them," said Murmex, "taught me everything they knew of sword play, from the day I could hold a toy lath sword."

"Hercules!" I cried, "and what did they say of your proficiency?"

"My father with his last breath," said Murmex solemnly, "and my uncle Pacideianus as he bade me farewell, told me that I am the best swordsman alive."

"Why have you never," I asked, "tried your luck in the arena?"

"My father forbade me," Murmex explained. "He bade me wait. He trowed a grown man was worth ten growing lads, and he said so and stuck to that. On his death-bed he told me I was almost seasoned. After we buried him I felt I could abide Nersae no longer. Uncle agreed with me that I had best follow my instincts. I fare to Rome to seek my fortune as a swordsman on the sand in the amphitheatres."

"You have fallen into good company," I said, "for I can bring you at once to the Emperor's notice."

"I should be most grateful," said Murmex.

At that instant we heard an halloo from the road and saw a horseman appear out of the mist, then a travelling carriage behind him. It was Martius. When he was near enough I could see his grave, handsome, mediocre face far back in the carriage, and beside it Marcia's; small, delicate, shell-pink, her intense blue eyes bright even in that blurred gloomy daylight, shining close together over her little aquiline nose.

We conferred and he agreed to fall in behind Tanno's extra bearers, between them and my farmers, Tanno's intendant getting in front of the litter where he normally belonged.

We got properly into line as arranged and plodded on down the road.

Just outside of Vediamnum was, as Tanno had related, the village idiot, guarding his flock of goats. He mowed and gibbered at us and then spoke some intelligible words, as he occasionally did.

"I know you, Hedulio," he called. "You can't hide yourself under that hat nor inside that raincloak. I know you, Hedulio. But nobody but an idiot would ever recognize you inside that rig and with all this escort. I know you, you aren't Vedius Vindex, you aren't Satronius Sabinus. You're Andivius Hedulio. I know you. But nobody else will guess who you are. Nobody else around here is an idiot!"

Again, as with Tanno's utterance when we were leaving my villa, the words fell on my ears but did not penetrate to my thinking consciousness. Had I noted what I heard, had I thought instantaneously of what the idiot's words really signified, I might even then have saved myself.

We plodded on, a long cavalcade of horsemen and bevy of men afoot, convoying a shut litter and a closed travelling carriage.

Round the turn of the road, after passing the idiot and his goats, with the brawling stream of the Bran Brook, now swollen to a respectable little river, on our left, with the wooded hills rising on our right, we entered the long, narrow winding single street of Vediamnum, a paved lane along the close-crowded tall stone houses built against the hillside on the northeast, with the stream along it to the southwest, and houses wedged between the street and the stream, brokenly, for about half of its length, with open intervals between.

As we entered the village I saw ahead on the street not a human form, saw no face at any door of any house. I wondered over this, wondered uncomprehendingly. I had never seen the street of Vediamnum. wholly deserted, not even in rains much harder than that which descended on us. Still wondering, still uncomprehending, when we were far enough into the village for the travelling carriage to be already between the first houses, I saw fall across the roadway, in front of me, two stout trunks of trimmed trees, straight like pine trees; I heard the crash as they jarred on the stones of the stream-side wall, I saw them quiver as they settled; breast high and shoulder high from house-wall to house-wall, effectually blocking the highway.

At the same instant there sounded a chorus of yells, shouts, calls, cheers and commands; and men poured out of the house doors, out of the alleys between the houses, up the river bank in the unbuilt intervals; men hatless and cloakless, clad only in their tunics, men with clubs, with staffs, with staves, with bludgeons, with cudgels, men yelling:

"Greia! Greia! Rescue Greia! Club 'em! Brain 'em! Chase 'em! Vedius forever! At 'em boys! Mustard's the word! Make 'em run! Rescue Posis!"

They clubbed us. They clubbed the horses, they clubbed the mules, they clubbed the bearers and their reliefs. They gave us no time to explain, and though I yelled out who I was and who was with me, though Hirnio and Tanno and Martius yelled similarly, their explanations were unheard in the hubbub or unheeded. Also our effort to explain was brief. Swathed as we were in our cloaks the hot gush of rage that flamed up in us drove us instinctively to free our arms and fight.

Now anyone might suppose that it would be an easy matter for some eighteen horsemen to ride down and scatter a mob of varlets afoot. So it would be in the open, when the riders were aware of the attack and ready to meet it. We were taken wholly by surprise whereas our assailants were ready and agreed. For a moment it looked like a rout for us, our horses and mules rearing and kicking, our whole caravan in confusion, jammed together higgledy-piggledy, with all our attackers headed for the carriage, mistaking Marcia for Greia.

Marcia never screamed, never moved, sat still and silent, apparently calm and placid.

They all but dragged her out of the carriage.

In fact we should indubitably have been frightfully mauled and Marcia carried off had it not been for Murmex and Tanno.

At first onset Tanno had yelled explanations; but almost with his first yell he rolled out of his litter, snatched a spare pole from a relief, and with it laid about him; Murmex did the like. The two of them, one on the right of the litter and carriage, the other on the left, bore the whole shock of our attackers' first rush and alone delayed it.

Somehow, probably by Tanno's orders, perhaps by their own instincts, the reliefs with the other poles handed them to Hirnio and me as we dismounted. Three of the clever blacks caught our horses and Murmex's. Others detached the poles from the litter and the four biggest bearers seized them and used them vigorously.

Thus, actually quicker than it takes to tell of it, eight powerful, skillful and justly incensed men on our side were plying litter poles against the cudgels of our attackers.

I was severely bruised before I warmed up to my work; when I did warm up I laid a man flat with every blow of the pole I wielded.

When my adversaries had had a sufficient taste of my skill to cause them to draw away from me, as far as they could in that press of men, horses and mules, and I had cleared a space around me, I looked about.

Agathemer, light built as he was, had wrenched a bludgeon from some Vedian and was wielding it not ineffectually.

Hirnio was doing his part in the fighting like a gentleman and an expert.

But Murmex and Tanno chiefly caught my eye.

It was wonderful to see Tanno fight. Every swing of his pole cracked on a skull. Men fell about him by twos and threes, one on the other.

If Tanno was wonderful Murmex was marvellous. Never had I seen a man handle a staff so rapidly and effectively.

By this time my nine tenants were afoot, and uncloaked. Now a Sabine farmer, afoot or horsed, is never without his trusty staff of yew or holly or thorn. These the nine used to admiration, if less miraculously than Tanno and Murmex.

Since there were now a round dozen skilled fencers plying their staffs on our side, and four huge and mighty Nubians doing their best (with no mean skill of their own, either) to assist us, we soon were on the way to victory.

The remnant of our adversaries still on their feet fled; fled up the alleys between the houses, into the houses, down the bank towards the stream or into the stream, over the barricade of the twin logs.

That barricade made it impossible for us to go on. The number of men laid low, some of whom were reviving from their stunned condition and crawling or staggering away from under the hoofs of the crazed horses and mules, made it unthinkable that any explanation of the mistake which had led to the fracas could be possible, or if possible, that explanation could quench the fires of animosity which blazed in the breasts of all concerned.

With one accord, without any conference or the exchange of a word, our party made haste to escape from Vediamnum before our assailants rallied for a second onset. No horse or mule was hamstrung or lamed, no man had been knocked senseless. All of us were more or less bruised and sore, some were bleeding, two of my tenants had blood pouring from torn scalps, but every man, horse and mule was fit to travel.

We carried, lifted, dragged or rolled out of the way the disabled Vedians in the roadbed, making sure that not one was killed, we somehow got the travelling carriage turned round, no small feat in that narrow space; we readjusted the litter-poles, Tanno climbed in, Hirnio and Murmex and I mounted, Tanno's extra litter bearers led my farmers' horses and mules and we set off on our retreat, my nine tenants, even with two of them half scalped, forming a rearguard of entirely competent bludgeoners; certainly they must have impressed the Vedians as adequate, for no face so much as showed at a doorway until we were clear of the village and my tenants remounted. Then came a few derisive yells after us as the mist cut off our view of the nearest houses.

We made haste, you may be sure. Outside of the village we passed the idiot and his goats. He mowed and grinned at us, but uttered no word. We saw no other human figure till we had passed the entrance to Villa Vedia and felt safer. Nor did we pass anyone between that cross-road and the foot of my road, save only the same immobile horseman on the same knoll, in the same position, and, apparently, at precisely the

same spot, as if he were indeed an equestrian statue. His salutation was as curt as before.

At the foot of my road we held a consultation. Hirnio advised returning to my villa and demanding an apology from Vedius, even instituting legal proceedings at Reate if he did not make an apology and enter a disclaimer. But Tanno, Martius and all my tenants, even the two with cracked heads, were for going on, and, of course, Murmex, who talked as if he had been a member of our company from the first.

"Hercules be good to me," Tanno cried, "to get out of this cursed neighborhood I am willing even to face the horrors of the bit of road I suffered on as I came up. Let us be off on our road to Rome."

"With all my heart," I said. "But first tell me who or what is that voiceless and moveless horseman we passed twice between here and the crossroads. You said you knew."

"I do know," Tanno grunted, "and I'm not fool enough to blurt it out on a country road, either. Let's be off. Attention! Form ranks! Ready! Forward! March!"

Off we set, ordering our caravan as at first, except that Agathemer rode by me, with Hirnio and Murmex in advance.

We plodded down the muddy road, through the fine, continuous drizzle, wrapped in our cloaks, all the world about us helmed in fog, mist and rain, the trees looming blurred and gray-green in the wet air.

Without meeting any wayfarers, with little talk among ourselves, we had passed the entrance to Villa Satronia and were no great distance from the Salarian Highway, when, where the road traversed a dense bit of woodland, the trees of which met overhead, the underbrush on both sides of the road suddenly rang with yells and was alive with excited men.

It was almost the duplicate of our experience in Vediamnum, save that our assailants were more numerous and shouted:

"Xantha, Xantha, rescue Xantha!"

"Satronius forever! Eat 'em alive, boys! Get Xantha! Get Xantha!" and such like calls.

This time we had an infinitesimally longer warning, as the bushes to right and left of the road were further apart than had been the houses lining the streets of Vediamnum; also we reacted more quickly to the yells, having heard the like such a short time before.

The fight was fully joined all along the line and was raging with no advantage for either side, when I missed a parry and knew no more.

Afterwards I was told that I fell stunned from a blow on the head and lay, bleeding not only from a terrific scalp wound but also from a dozen other abrasions, until the fight was over, our assailants routed and completely put to flight, and Tanno with the rest of the pursuers returned to the travelling carriage and litter to find Marcia, pink and pretty and placid, seated as she had been when she left home, and me, weltering in a pool of blood.

A dozen Satronians lay stunned. Tanno reckoned two of them dead men.

I was the only man seriously hurt on our side.

Agathemer was for convoying me home.

Tanno hooted at the idea, expatiating on the distance from Reate and the improbability of such a town harboring a competent physician, on the number of excellent surgeons in Rome, on the advisability of getting me out of the locality afflicted with our Vedian-Satronian feud, and so on.

He had me bandaged as best might be and composed in his litter.

He took my horse.

To me the journey to Rome was and is a complete blank. I was mostly insensible, and, when I showed signs of consciousness, was delirious. I recall nothing except a vague sense of endless pain, misery and horror. I have no memory of anything that occurred on the road after I was hit on the head, nor of the first night at Vicus Novus nor of the second at Eretum. I first came to myself about the tenth hour of the third day, when we were but a short distance from Rome and in full sight of it. The view of Rome, from any eminence outside the city from which a view of it may be had, has always seemed to me the most glorious spectacle upon which a Roman may feast his eyes. As a boy my tutors had yielded to my importunities and had escorted me to every one of those elevations near the city famous as viewpoints. As a lad I had ridden out to each many times, whenever the weather promised a fine view, to delight my soul with the aspect of the

great city citizenship in which was my dearest heritage. To have been born a Roman was my chief pride; to gaze at Rome, to exult at the beauty of Rome, was my keenest delight.

More even than the acclaimed viewpoints, to which residents like me and visitors from all the world flocked on fine afternoons, did I esteem those places on the roads radiating from Rome where a traveller faring Romeward caught his first sight of the city; or those points where, if one road had several hill-crests in succession, one had the best view possible anywhere along the road.

Of the various roads entering Rome it always appeared to my judgment that the Tiburtine Highway afforded the most charming views of the city.

But, along the Salarian Highway, are several rises at the top of each of which one sees a fascinating picture when looking towards Rome. Of these my favorite was that from the crest of the ascent after one crosses the Anio, just after passing Antemnae, near the third milestone.

This view I love now as I have always loved it, as I loved it when a boy. To halt on that crest of the road, of a fair, still, mild, brilliant afternoon when the sun is already visibly declining and its rays fall slanting and mellow; to view the great city bathed in the warm, even light, its pinnacles, tower-roofs, domes, and roof-tiles flashing and sparkling in the late sunshine, all of it radiant with the magical glow of an Italian afternoon, to see Rome so vast, so grandiose, so majestic, so winsome, so lovely; to know that one owns one's share in Rome, that one is part of Rome; that, I conceive, confers the keenest joy of which the human heart is capable.

It so happened that Tanno had his litter opened, that I might get all the air possible, and the curtains looped back tightly. Somehow, at the very crest of that rise on the Salarian Road, on a perfect afternoon, about the tenth hour, I came to myself.

I was aching in every limb and joint, I was sore over every inch of my surface, I was all one jelly of bruises, my head and my left shin hurt me acutely. More than all that I was permeated by that nameless horror which comes from weakness and a high fever.

Now it would be impossible to convey, by any human words, the strangeness of my sensations. My sufferings, my illness, my distress of mind enveloped me and permeated me with a general misery in which I could not but loathe life, the world and anything I saw, and I saw before me the most magnificent, the most noble, the most inspiriting sight the world affords.

At the instant of reviving I was overwhelmed by my sensations, by my recollections of the two fights and of all they meant to me of misfortune and disaster, and I was more than overwhelmed by the glory spread before me. I went all hot and cold inside and all through me and lost consciousness.

After this lapse I was not conscious of anything until I began to be dimly aware that I was in my own bed in my own bedroom, in my own house and tended by my own personal servants.

Strangely enough this second awakening was as different as possible from my momentary revival near Antemnae. Then I had been appalled by the rush of varying sensations, crowding memories, conflicting emotions and daunting forebodings, each of which seemed as distinct, vivid and keen as every other of the uncountable swarm of impressions: I had felt acutely and cared extremely. Now every memory and sensation was blurred, no thought of the future intruded, I accepted without internal questionings whatever was done for me, and lay semi-conscious, incurious and indifferent. Mostly I dozed half-conscious. I was almost in a stupor, at peace with myself and all the world, wretched, yet acquiescing in my wretchedness, not rebellious nor recalcitrant.

This semi-stupor gradually wore off, my half-consciousness between long sleeps growing less and less blurred, my faculties more alive, my personality emerging.

When I came entirely to myself I found Tanno seated by my bed.

"You're all right now, Caius," he said, "I have kept away till Galen said you were well enough for me to talk to you."

"Galen?" I repeated, "have I been as ill as all that?"

"Not ill," Tanno disclaimed, "merely bruised. You are certainly a portent in a fight. I never saw you fight before, never saw you practice at really serious fencing, never heard anybody speak of you as an expert, or as a fighter. But I take oath I never saw a man handle a stave as you did. You were quicker than lightning, you seemed in ten places at once, you were as reckless as a Fury and as effectual as a thunderbolt. You laid men out by twos and threes. But jammed as you were in a press of enemies you were hit often and hard, so often and so hard that, after you were downed by a blow on the head, you never came to until I had you where you are."

"Yes I did," I protested, "I came to on the hilltop this side of
Antemnae."

"Not enough to tell any of us about it," he soothed me. "Anyhow, you are mending now and will soon be yourself."

I was indifferent. My mind was not yet half awake.

"Did I fight as well as you say?" I asked, "or are you flattering me?"

"No flattery, my boy," he said. "You are a portent."

Then he told me of the result of the fight with the Satronians, of their complete discomfiture and rout, of how he had brought me to Rome, seen me properly attended and looked after my tenants.

"They are having the best time," he said, "they ever had in all their lives."

And he told me where he had them lodged and which sights of Rome they had seen from day to day.

"Just as soon as I had seen to you and them," he said, "I called on dear old Nemestronia and told her of your condition. She is full of solicitude for you and will overwhelm you with dainties as soon as you are well enough to relish any."

He did not mention Vedia and I was still too dazed, too numb, too weak, too acquiescent to ask after her, or even to think of asking after her or to notice that he had not mentioned her.

"While I was talking to Nemestronia," Tanno said, "I took care to warn her about that cursed leopard. She would not agree to cage it, at least not permanently. She did agree to cage it at night and said she would not let it have the run of her palace even by day, as it has since she first got it, but would keep it shut up in the shrubbery garden, as she calls it, where they usually feed it and where you and I have seen it crawl up on its victims and pounce on them."

I could not be interested in leopards, or Nemestronia or even in Vedia, if he had mentioned Vedia. I fell into a half doze. Just on the point of going fast asleep I half roused, queerly enough.

"Caius!" I asked, "do you remember that man on horseback we passed in the rain between my road entrance and Vediamnum?"

"You can wager your estate I remember him!" Tanno replied.

"What sort of man was he?" I queried, struggling with my tendency to sleep. "You said you knew."

"I do know," Tanno asserted, "I cannot identify him, though I have questioned those who should know and who are safe. I should know his name, but I cannot recall it or place him. But I know his occupation. He is a professional informer in the employ of the palace secret service, an Imperial spy.

"Now what in the name of Mercury was he doing in the rain, on a Sabine roadside? I cannot conjecture."

This should have roused me staring wide awake.

But I was too exhausted to take any normal interest in anything.

"I can't conjecture either," I drawled thickly.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER VI
A RATHER BAD DAY

Next morning, strangely enough, I wakened at my normal, habitual time for wakening when in town, and wakened feeling weak indeed and still sore in places, but entirely myself in general and filled with a sort of sham energy and spurious vigor.

By me, when I woke, was Occo, my soft-voiced, noiseless-footed, deft- handed personal attendant. At my bidding he summoned Agathemer. When I told him that I proposed to get up, dress and go out as I usually did when in Rome, in fact that I intended to follow the conventional and fashionable daily routine to which I had been habituated, he protested vigorously. He said that both Celsianus and Galen, the two most acclaimed physicians in Rome, who had been called in in consultation by my own physician, but also he himself, had enjoined most emphatically that I must remain abed for some days yet, must keep indoors for many days more, if I was to continue on the road to recovery on which their ministrations had set me, and that all three had bidden him tell me that any transgression of their instructions would expose me to the probability of a relapse far more serious than my initial illness and to a far longer period of inactivity.

I was determined and obstinate. When he added that I must not only remain quiet, but must not talk for any length of time nor concern myself with any news or any matters likely to excite me, I revolted. I commanded him to obey me and to be silent as to the physicians' orders.

I began by asking him what day it was. I then learned that I had been ill fifteen days since reaching Rome, for I had left my villa on the eighth day before the Ides of June and it was now the ninth day before the Kalends of July.

Next I asked after my tenants. Agathemer said that they had most dutifully presented themselves each morning to salute me and attend my reception, if I should be well enough to hold one; to ask after my progress towards recovery if I was not; that Ligo Atrior, as recognized leader among them, had also come each evening between bath-time and dinner-time to ask personally after my condition; that, as all the physicians had, the day before, stated that I must by no means be allowed to see anyone save Tanno or to leave my bedroom, for some days, he had told Ligo the evening before not to diminish his and his fellows' time for sight-seeing by coming on this particular morning; that Ligo had expressed his unalterable intention of coming each evening in any case.

I commended Agathemer's discretion but told him to tell Ligo, when he came in the afternoon, that I intended to hold a reception next morning and wanted to see all nine of them at it.

I then asked about Murmex. Agathemer said that Tanno had offered to bring him to the Emperor's notice, but that Murmex had declined, thanking him, but remarking that, as I had offered to bring him to the Emperor's notice, it would be bad manners on his part to appear under the countenance of any other patron and would moreover be inviting bad luck instead of good luck on his presentation.

Agathemer said Murmex had called twice to ask after me and had told him where he lodged. I instructed him to apprise Murmex of my intention to hold a morning reception. I knew Agathemer would send out notifications to all my city clients of long standing without any admonition of mine.

He told me that no message of any kind had come from Vedia nor from Vedius Vedianus, the head of her clan, nor from Satronius Satro. I could not conjecture just why Vedia had remained silent, and I was not only worried over the fact of her silence and aloofness, but felt myself wearied, even after a very short time, by the uncontrollable turmoil of my mind, puzzling as to why she had ignored me.

As to Vedius and Satronius, I was vividly aware of their state of mind and acutely wretched over it.

Only nineteen days before I had seen my triclinium walled and floored with flowers presented by the local leader of one clan; had seen my dinner table groan under the fruit sent me by the local leader of the other clan, had known that both clans were competing for my favor and that I was high in the good graces of each.

Now I felt that all men of both clans must be bitterly incensed with me, for I knew their clan-pride. No man of either clan would weigh the facts: that neither fight had been of my seeking; that both fights had been forced on me; that I could not by any exercise of ingenuity have avoided either, once the onset began; that each had been the result of the headlong impetuosity and self-deception of my assailants, that both were the outcome of conditions which I could not be expected to recognize as dangerous beforehand, of a mistake not of my causing, for which I was in no way to blame. I knew that every man of both clans, and most of all the head of each clan, would consider nothing except that I had participated in a roadside brawl in which men of their clan had been roughly handled, some of them by me personally, and from which their men had fled in confusion, routed partly by my participation.

I saw myself embroiled with both clans, conjectured that the two fights were the staple of the clan gossip on both sides, and that animosity against me was increasing from day to day. I felt impelled to state my case to both Vedius and Satronius, but I knew that even if I had been in the best of health, even if I should be eloquent beyond my best previous effort, there was little or no chance that anything I might say would avail to placate either magnate or to abate either's hostility toward me. And I knew that, in my dazed condition, the chances were that I would bungle the simplest mental task.

Yet I formed the purpose of attempting, that very morning, to see both Satronius and Vedius, and of attempting, if I was admitted to either, to convince him that he had no reason to be incensed with me, but that he should rather be incensed against my assailants: an aim impossible of attainment, as I knew, but would not admit to myself.

As I was to have no reception that morning I lay abed a while longer, at
Agathemer's earnest solicitation.
Little good it did me. In my mind, behind my shut eyelids, I rehearsed the unfortunate occurrences on the road, I groped back to their causes.

I could see that Tanno's jesting replies to the Satronians he had met on the road had given them the idea that Xantha was being conveyed, in a shut litter, to Villa Vedia: similarly his quizzical words to the Vedians he had met had given them a similar notion that Greia was being smuggled behind slid panels and drawn curtains, to Villa Satronia.

The men of each side had spread their conjecture among their clansmen. Each side had made the forecast that the abductors would try to carry off their prize to Rome: each had calculated that the other side would try to fool them, that they would not travel the obvious road, but try to escape by boldly following the route least to be expected. So the Vedians inferred that the Satronians, instead of taking their direct road to the Salarian Highway, would expect an ambush along it and would try to sneak through Vediamnum. Therefore they were in ambush at Vediamnum. Similarly and for similar reasons the Satronians were in ambush below their road entrance, calculating that the Vedians would pass that way.

I had blundered on both ambushes in succession.

I lay, eyes closed, raging at my lack of foresight and at my hideous bad luck.

When Agathemer knew that I could not be kept longer abed he brought me a cup of delicious hot mulled wine and a roll almost as well-flavored as Ofatulena's, for my town cook was fit for a senator's kitchen. I lay still a while longer.

When I stood up I felt dizzy and faint, but I was resolved and stubborn. Besides, I craved fresh air and thought that an airing would revive me. In fact, once out of doors and in my litter, with all Uncle's sliding panels open, I felt very much better. I told my bearers to take me to the Vedian mansion.

There the doorkeeper, indeed, stared, and the footmen nudged each other, but I was received civilly and was shown into the atrium, which I found crowded with the clan clients and with gentlemen like myself.

The atrium of the Vedian mansion had kept, by family tradition, a sort of affectation of old-fashioned plainness. It was indeed lined with expensive marbles, but it was far soberer in coloring, far simpler in every detail, than most atriums of similar houses. Instead of striving for an effect of opulent gorgeousness by every device of material, color and decoration, the heads of the Vedian family had expressed, in their atrium, their cult of primitive simplicity. Compared with others of the houses of senators their atrium appeared bare and bleak.

His guests gazed at me curiously as I advanced to greet our host.

Vedius, the smallest man in the throng, stood blinking at me with his red eyelids, his bald head shining from its top to the thin fringe of reddish hair above his big flaring ears, his small wizened face all screwed up into a knot, his thin lips pursed, his little ferret eyes, close-set against his mean, miserly nose, peering at me under their blinking red lids.

His expression was malign and sneering, his tone sarcastic, but his mere words were not discourteous.

"I am delighted to see you, Andivius," he said, "and very much amazed to see you here.

"I have been told that on the eighth day before the Ides, you entered Vediamnum early of a rainy morning, with an escort so numerous that none could have conjectured that the cavalcade was yours; that, when three or four of the inhabitants of the village accosted you civilly and asked who you were and where you were going, your men, without any reply, fell on them and beat them unmercifully; that, when the population of Vediamnum rushed to the assistance of their fellows, your convoy set upon them and started a pitched battle, mishandling them so frightfully that the street was strewn with stunned and bleeding villagers; that you not only participated in the affray, but fomented it and led it; that the two men who have since died, fell under blows from your own quarter-staff.

"Now, the fact that I see you here leads me to conjecture that, after the occurrences which I have rehearsed, you would not have presented yourself before me and come to salute me, had you not had some version of these events other than that uniformly reported to me. If you have any version differing from those which I have heard, speak; we listen."

I had begun to feel dizzy and faint just as soon as I was indoors, I seemed dazed and as if my faculties were numb; at his ironical mock- courtesy I felt myself hot and cold all over. Yet I essayed to state my side of the case.

I explained all the circumstances, narrated Tanno's unexpected arrival, his quizzical bantering of the persons whom he encountered on the road, my tenants' petition, my agreement with Marcus Martins, the accretion of Hirnio and Murmex to our party, Tanno's insistence on reaching the Salarian Highway through Vediamnum, and all the other trivial factors which had conspired to my undoing; I described the affray in Vediamnum, both as I had seen it and as Tanno and Agathemer had told me of it; similarly the fight below Villa Satronia. I thought I was lucid and convincing.

When I paused Vedius leered at me.

"Andivius," he said, "I am not such a fool as you take me for. I am not in any way deceived by all that rigmarole. I see through you and your words as I saw through your actions. I comprehend perfectly that you connived with the Satronians to entice my people into a roadside brawl to discredit our clan. I understand how ingeniously you made all your arrangements, even to concocting a sham fight with the Satronians to enable you to put forward the excuses you have offered.

"Your plans miscarried at only two points: you did not mean to leave any corpses, yet you caused the deaths of two of my retainers; you did not mean to suffer anything yourself, yet in your sham fight you were accidentally hit on the head.

"Blows on the head often unsettle the intellect. I take that into consideration in dealing with you. If you go home now and recover from your injury your mind will clear. Then you will have wit enough to decide how soon and how often it will be advisable for you to return here!"

His labored sarcasm was entirely intelligible. I bade him farewell as ceremoniously as I could manage.

He silkily said:

"I have a bit of parting advice for you, Andivius. The climate of Bruttium is far better than that of Rome or Sabinum in promoting a recovery from any sort of illness; it is also far more conducive to long life. If you are wise Rome will not see you linger here, nor will either Sabinum or Rome see you return; a word to the wise is enough."

Somehow I reached my litter. I understood his implied threat and saw endless difficulties and perils confronting me.

At the Satronian mansion the lackeys were insolent and it needed all Agathemer's tact and self-control, and all mine to browbeat them into admitting me.

As much as possible in contrast with the Vedian atrium was the Satronian atrium, a hall decorated as gorgeously, floridly and opulently as any in Rome; fairly walled with statues almost jostling in their niches, so closely were the niches set; and all behind, between and above them ablaze with crimson and glittering with gilding; every inch of walls and ceiling carved, colored, gilded and glowing.

Satronius was similarly in contrast with Vedius, a man tall, bulky, swarthy, rubicund and overbearing.

No finesse about Satronius, not a trace.

From amid his bevy of sycophants and toadies, over the heads of his fashionably garbed guests, he towered, his face red as a beacon, his big bullet head wagging, his great mouth open.

He roared at me:

"What brings you here, with your hands red with the blood of three of my henchmen? No Greek can outdo you in effrontery, Andivius. You are the shame of our nobility. To force your way into my morning reception after having killed three of my men in an unprovoked assault on them on the open road on my own land!"

I kept my temper and somehow kept my head clear, though it buzzed, and I kept my feet though I seemed to myself to reel. I spoke up for myself boldly and, I thought, expounded the circumstances and my version of the brawls even better than I had to Vedius.

To my amazement Satronius, in more brutal language, all but duplicated what Vedius had said to me, only reversing the clan names. He was convinced that I had assaulted his men by prearrangement with the Vedians, after a mock fight with them at Vediamnum.

I saw I was accomplishing nothing and endeavored to escape after a formal farewell.

Satronius roared after me:

"You left three corpses on the roadway below my villa. I'll not forget them nor will any man of my name. If you have sense you'll keep away from Sabinum, you'll get out of Rome, you'll hide yourself far away. My men have long memories and keen eyes. There'll be another corpse found somewhere by and by and the score paid off."

I laughed mirthlessly to myself as I climbed into my litter. I had, in fact, embroiled myself hopelessly with both sides of the feud.

Then my men carried me to the Palace.

The enormousness and magnificence of the great public throne-room had always overwhelmed me with a sense of my own insignificance. On that morning, chagrined at my reception by Vedius and Satronius, weak, ill and tottering on my feet, needing all my will power to stand steadily and not reel, with my head buzzing and my ears humming, feeling large and light and queer, I was abased and crushed by the vastness and hugeness of the room and by the uncountable crowd which thronged it.

Necessarily I was kept standing a long time in the press, and, in my weakened condition, I found my toga more than usually a burden, which is saying a great deal.

I suppose the toga was a natural enough garment for our ancestors, who practically wore nothing else, as their tunics were short and light. But since we have adopted and even developed foreign fashions in attire, we are sufficiently clad without any toga at all. To have to conceal one's becoming clothes under a toga, on all state and official occasions, is irritating to any well-dressed man even in the coldest weather, when the weight of the toga is unnoticed, since its warmth is grateful.

But to have to stew in a toga in July, when the lightest clothing is none too light, is a positive affliction, even out of doors on a breezy day. Indoors, in still and muggy weather, when one is jammed in a throng for an hour or two, a toga becomes an instrument of torture. Yet togas we must wear at all public functions, and though we rage at the infliction and wonder at the queerness of the fate which has, by mere force of traditional fashion, condemned us to such unconscionable sufferings, yet no one can devise any means of breaking with our hereditary social conventions in attire. Therefore we continue to suffer though we rail.

If a toga is a misery to a strong, well man, conceive of the agonies I suffered in my weakened state, when I needed rest and fresh air, and had to stand, supporting that load of garments, the sweat soaking my inner tunic, fainting from exhaustion and heat.

I somewhat revived when Tanno edged his way through the crowd and stood by me. We talked of my health, he rebuking me for my rashness in coming out so soon, I protesting that I was plenty well enough and feeling better for my outing.

There we stood an hour or more, very uncomfortable, Tanno making conversation to keep me cheerful.

I needed his companionship and the atmosphere he diffused. For in addition to my illness and the circumstances I have described, I suffered from the proximity of Talponius Pulto, my only enemy among my acquaintances in the City. I had seen him once already that morning, in the Vedian atrium, where he had stood beside Vedius Vedianus, towering over his diminutive host, for he was a very tall man. Now, in the Imperial Audience Hall, he was almost a full head taller than any man in the press about him, so that I could not but be aware of his satirical gaze.

He was a singularly handsome man, surpassed by few among our nobility, and I had remarked how he dwarfed Vedius, how he made him appear stunted and contemptible. He had a head well shaped and well set, curly brown hair, fine and abundant, a high forehead, wide-set dark blue eyes, a chiseled nose, a perfect mouth and a fine, rounded chin. His neck was the envy of half our most beautiful women. His carriage was noble and he always looked a very distinguished man.

I could never divine why he hated me, but hate me he had from our earliest encounters. He derided me, maligned me and had often thwarted me from, apparently, mere spitefulness.

As I knew his evil gaze on me I now, in my weakened condition, somehow felt unable to bear it.

Yet I was somewhat buoyed up, as I stood there, by a recurrence of thoughts which I had often had before under similar circumstances. Most men of my rank seemed to take their wealth and position as matters of course. I never could. I have, all my life, at times meditated on my good fortune in being a Roman and a Roman of equestrian rank. While waiting in the great Audience Hall of the Palace, especially, the emotions aroused by these meditations often became so poignant as almost to overcome me, on this day in particular. As I viewed the splendor of the Hall and the gorgeousness of the crowd that

thronged it, my heart swelled at the thought of being part of all that magnificence. It thrilled me to feel that I had a share and had a right to a share in Rome's glory.

The Emperor was busy with a succession of embassies, delegations and so on, and, as far as I could see, was in a good humor and trying to appear affable and not to seem bored.

After the deputations were disposed of the senators passed before the throne and saluted the Prince. Commodus barely spoke to most of them; it seemed to me, indeed, that he said more to Vedius and Satronius than to any other senators.

Then came the turn of us knights, far more numerous than the senators. The ushers positively hurried us along.

To me, to my amazement, the Emperor spoke very kindly.

"I am delighted to see you here today, Hedulio." he said.

"And I am sorry that I have no time for what I want to ask you and say to you.

"I have heard of your illness and I know how it originated. Galen told me you ought to keep your bed for days yet. Are you sure you are well enough to be out?"

"I think it is doing me good, your Majesty," I replied. "Your words are, I know."

"If you feel too ill to come here tomorrow," he said, "I'll hold you excused, but in that case send a message early. I want you here tomorrow, specially, come if you can.

"Meanwhile, tell me, has coming here to-day tired you? Can you stay longer?"

"I certainly can," I replied, elated at his notice.

"Then stay here till this tiresome ceremonial is over," he said, "and accompany me to the Palace Stadium. I have some yokes of chariot horses to look over and try out, and some new chariots to try. I want you there. I may need your advice."

Flattered, I felt strength course through my veins and fatigue vanish. I passed completely round the lower part of the room and, with Tanno, took my stand near the southeastern door, by which he would pass out if on his way to the Stadium.

Few senators passed through that door with the party of which I was one, the invitations being based on horsemanship and good fellowship, not on wealth, social prominence or political importance.

In the Stadium, of course, it was not only possible but natural to sit down and Tanno and I took our seats in the shade and as far back as our rank permitted.

I was amazed to find how much I needed to sit down, what a relief it was, and to realize how near I had been to fainting. In the breezy shade I soon revived and felt my strength come back.

From my comfortable seat I watched one of those exhibitions of miraculous horsemanship of which only Commodus was capable.

The Palace Stadium, of course, is a very large and impressive structure and its arena of no mean extent. But compared, not merely with the Circus Maximus, but with the Flaminian Circus or Domitian's Stadium it seemed small and contracted.

In this comparatively cramped space Commodus, divested of his official robes and clad only in a charioteer's tunic, belt and boots, performed some amazing feats of horsemastery.

The pace to which he could speed up a four-horse team on that short straight-away, his ability to postpone slowing them down for the turn, and yet to pull them in handily and in time, the deftness and precision of his short turns, the promptness with which he compelled them to gather speed after the turn, these were astonishing, enough; but far more astonishing were his grace of pose, his perfect form in every motion, the ease of all his manoeuvres, the sense of his effortless control of his vehicle, of reserve strength greatly in excess of the strength he exerted; these were nothing short of dazzling. His pride in his artistry, for it amounted to that, and his enjoyment of every detail of what he did and of the sport in general, was infectious and delightful. I felt my love of horses growing in me with my admiration for so perfect a horseman, felt the like in all the spectators.

Team after team and chariot after chariot he tried out.

Meanwhile Tanno and I, seated comfortably side by side, varied our watching of Commodus and our praises of his driving with talk of my embroilment with both sides of the feud, with rehearsing to each other the unseen missteps which had led me into such a hideous predicament, and with discussions of what might be done to set me right with both clans. Also he described again to me what had occurred on the road after I was

knocked senseless and rehearsed his version of both fights, I commenting and telling him what I recalled.

"What occupies my thoughts most," he said, "is that statuesque horseback informer planted by the roadside in the rain. What in the name of Mercury was he doing in your Sabine fog so early on a wet day?"

I was unable to make any conjecture.

For some time Commodus was almost uninterruptedly on the arena, making his changes from team to team, with scarcely an instant's interval. When he lingered under the arcade at the starting end of the Stadium Tanno remarked:

"We had best join the gathering. Do you feel sufficiently rested?"

I stood up and, for the first time that day, did so without any dizziness, lightheadedness or weakness in my knees. I felt almost myself.

Under the arcade we found Commodus explaining the merits of a new chariot made after his own design. It was a beautiful specimen of the vehicle- maker's art, its pole tipped with a bronze lion's head exquisitely chased, the pole itself of ash, the axle and wheel-spokes of cornel-wood, all the woodwork gilded, the hubs and tires of wrought bronze, also gilded, the front of the chariot-body of hammered bronze, embossed with figures depicting two of the Labors of Hercules; every part profusely decorated and the whole effect very tasteful.

Commodus ignored all these beauties entirely and discoursed of its measurements.

"Come close, Hedulio," he commanded, "this is just what I wanted you for."

The jockeys, athletes, acrobats and mimes about him made way for Tanno and me and some other gentlemen.

"I have always had very definite theories of chariot construction," Commodus went on. "I hold that the popular makes are all bad; in fact I am positively of the opinion that the tendencies in chariot building have been all in the wrong direction for centuries. They have followed and intensified the traditions from ancient days, when chariots were chiefly used for battle and only once in a while for racing.

"For battle purposes chariots, of course, were built for speed and quick turning, but after that, to avoid upsets. When a man was going to drive a pair of half-wild stallions across

trackless country, over gullies and boulders, through bushes, up and down hill, often along a gravelly hillside, he saw to it that his chariot would keep right side up no matter how it bounced and tilted and swerved. He made sure that his axle was long, his wheels far apart, and their spokes short, so that his chariot- bed was as low as possible. He was right.

"But, after fighting from chariots was wholly a thing of the past in Italy and chariots were used, as they are used, for racing only, why cling to provisions for obsolete uses?

"A good general thinks of winning victories, not, like the fools I have disgracing me along the Rhine, of avoiding defeats. So a good charioteer ought to think, not of avoiding upsets, but of winning races. Yet all charioteers appear to want their vehicles as low built as possible, with short spoked wheels, wide apart on the ends of a long axle. That makes them feel safer on a short turn, and, so help me Hercules, I hardly blame them, anyhow. Besides, they all want to spraddle their legs apart and set their feet wide, so as to stand firm on the chariot bed, so they want the chariot body made as wide as possible.

"Now I don't need to plant my feet far apart when I drive. I believe I could drive on one foot and keep my balance. So I hold a broad chariot body is worse than unnecessary. More than that I maintain that the lower the axle is set, the less the team's strength goes into attaining speed. The lower the axle is set, the more sharply the pole slopes upward from the axle to the yoke-ring; the less of the team's energy goes into pulling the chariot along, the more of it is wasted, so to speak, on lifting the chariot into the air at every leap forward. The higher the axle is set, the nearer the pole is to being level, the less power is wasted on that upward pull and the more is utilized on the forward pull and goes to produce speed.

"Then again, I maintain that the farther apart the wheels are set the more one drags against the other, not only at the turns, where anyone can see the outer wheel drag on the inner, but at every swerve of the team on the straightaway. All such dragging reduces speed and tires the team with pulling which is energy utterly wasted.

"I hold the ideal racing chariot should have a chariot body as narrow as possible, not much wider than the width of the driver's hips; should have the wheels as close together as possible, to diminish the drag of one wheel against the other, should have the axle set as high as can be managed.

"All charioteers exclaim that such a chariot tends to overset. So it does. But I never have had an overset and I never expect to overset. I know how to drive and poise myself so as to keep my chariot right side up, and I never think of oversetting, I think of winning my race, and always do.

"Anyhow, here before your eyes, is my new racing chariot and of all the chariots ever made on earth this has the longest wheel-spokes, the highest-set axle, the closest-set wheels and the narrowest chariot body. Now I'm going to try it out and show it off."

He did to admiration, amid excited acclaims, his four cream-colored mares fairly flying along the straights and taking the turns at a pace which made us hold our breath.

After this thrilling exhibition he came back under the arcade and spoke to me first.

"Hedulio," he said, "you are one of the most competent horsemasters I ever knew. What do you think of my idea of the best form for a racing chariot?"

"I think," I said, "that it has all the merits you claim for it, but that not one charioteer in ten thousand could drive in it and avoid an upset, sooner or later, at a turn."

"Right you are!" he replied, "but I am one charioteer in ten thousand."

"Say in a hundred thousand," I ventured to add. "For surely you could not find, among all the professionals in the Empire, any other man to equal you in team-driving."

He beamed at me.

When we left the Palace Tanno saw me in my litter and insisted on following behind mine in his until he had seen me out of mine and into my own house.

There I had a very brief and very light lunch, Agathemer hovering over me and reminding me of Galen's orders for my diet, so that I found myself forbidden every viand which I craved and asked for, and limited to the very simple fare which had been prepared for me.

After lunch I went to bed and to sleep.

I woke soon and very wide awake. When I rolled into bed I had felt so utterly done up with the excitement of my interviews with Vedius and Satronius, with the exertion of standing in the Throne-room and through the Emperor's lecture on chariot design, that I had renounced my intention of calling on Vedia and had resigned myself to postponing my attempt to see her until the morrow.

I woke all feverish energy and restless determination to go to see her at once. Therefore, between the siesta hour and the hour of the bath, I presented myself at Vedia's mansion.

I was at once ushered into her atrium, where I found myself alone and where I sat waiting some time.

When a maid summoned me into her tablinum, I found her alone, seated in her favorite lounging chair, charmingly attired and, I thought, more lovely than I had ever seen her.

"Oh, Caia!" I cried.

She bridled and stared at me haughtily.

"'Vedia,'" if you please, she said coldly. "You have no manner of right to
'Caia' me, Andivius."
The distant formality of her address, her disdainful tone, the affront of her words, chilled me like a dash of cold water.

"Caia!" I stammered, "Vedia, I mean. What has happened? What is wrong?" For I could not credit that she would be incensed with me because of my involvement in the affray in Vediamnum nor that she would condemn me unheard, especially as Tanno had told me, in the Stadium of the Palace, that he had taken care to call on Vedia, and give her his version of my mishap.

She glowered at me.

"Your effrontery," she burst out, "amazes me. I am incredulous that I really see you in my home, that you really have the shamelessness to force yourself into my presence! It is an unforgivable affront that you should pretend love for me and aspire to be my husband and all the while be philandering after a freedwoman; but that you should parade yourself on the high road with her all the way from your villa to Rome, with the hussy enthroned in your own travelling carriage, is far worse. That you should get involved in roadside brawls with competitors for the possession of the minx is worse yet. Worst of all that you should advertise by all these doings, to all our world, your infatuation for such a creature and your greater interest in her than in me. I am indignant that I have considered marrying a suitor capable of such vileness, of such fatuity, of such folly."

I was like a sailboat taken all aback by a sudden change of wind. I could not believe my ears.

"I never took the slightest interest in Marcia," I protested, "except to keep my uncle from marrying her, after he set her free. She made eyes at me also, of course, for she made

eyes at every marriageable man within reach. But I never had anything to do with her, never called on her by myself, never so much as talked to her alone. I went to her dinners, of course. All widowers and bachelors of our district went to her dinners. But her dinners were the pattern of propriety in every way. Your own grandmother's famous dinners were not more decorous. Except for being a guest, with others, at her dinners, I never was at her villa. I lent my carriage not to her but to her bridegroom, Marcus Martius, a prosperous gentleman of my neighborhood, of whom you have often heard me speak, a friend of my uncle's and a friend of mine since boyhood. The fights, as Tanno explained to you, had nothing to do with Marcia and her involvement in them was as accidental as mine."

Vedia did not look a particle mollified.

"You men," she said, "are all alike. You will philander about your nasty jades. But, at least, when you vow that you love one woman and one only, and use every artifice to induce her to marry you, you should feel it incumbent on you to keep away from such creatures as this Marcia of yours. But you must needs dangle about her and go to her dinners. That was bad enough. But, while wooing me, to arrange a mock marriage for her with a local confederate and then positively bring her to Rome with you was infinitely worse. I am insulted, of course. But, above and beyond your treachery to me, I am insulted at your bungling your clumsy intrigues and flaunting the minx in the face of all the world and setting all fashionable Rome to gossiping about you and your hussy and to wondering how I am going to act about it.

"I'll show them and you how I am going to act! I'm angry at your double- dealing; at your lies I am furious. I hate you. I hope I'll never set eyes on you again. The sooner you are gone, the better I'll like it. And I'll give orders to ensure your never darkening my doors again!"

I tried to argue with her, to persuade her, to convince her, to induce her to listen to me.

She raged at me.

Dazed, I groped my way to my litter and, once in it, lost consciousness entirely, not in a faint, but in the sleep of total exhaustion.

As I rolled into my litter, feeling utterly unfit to enjoy a bath with any natural associates, I had ordered my bearers to take me home.

There I rested a while, for I waked before I reached home. Then I bathed, ate a simple dinner, alone with Agathemer, and went at once to bed.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER VII
A RATHER GOOD DAY

I slept soundly all night but woke at the first appearance of light. I lay abed, my mind milling over my situation, over Vedia's unexpected jealousy of Marcia, over the absurdity of it, over her illogical but impregnable indignation and over the equally baseless but similarly unalterable hostility of Vedius and Satronius.

I concluded to try again to placate all three. It seemed to me I could recall many omissions and infelicities in what I had said to both magnates, while in dealing with Vedia I seemed to myself to have been tongue-tied and fragmentary.

After the bit of bread and hot mulled wine which I did not crave, but which Agathemer insisted on my taking according to Galen's orders, I held a brief morning reception. My nine farmer-tenants were all present, all pathetically and touchingly glad to see me again about, even old Chryseros Philargyrus.

They had a petition to prefer, namely, that I should give them permission to leave Rome and return home, jointly and severally, just as soon as they pleased. Ligo Atrior acted as spokesman and said that they had come provided for a month's stay, as I had ordered, but they felt that they could see all the sights of Rome which would interest them before the month was out, and some sooner than others. Moreover they felt that although they had left their farms in the best of condition and in faithful hands, yet their desire to return home would soon overcome their interest in sight-seeing and would grow more overmastering daily.

I readily accorded what they asked.

Murmex Lucro was there, and his appearance of superhuman strength impressed me even more than on the road, I bade him meet me at the Palace, and instructed him by which entrance to approach it and at what portal and precisely where to take his stand in order that I might not miss him. Agathemer suggested that I detail one of my slaves to act as his guide and I did so.

My salutants disposed of without hurry and to the last man, in spite of
Agathemer's protests, I ordered my litter.
At the Vedian mansion I was refused admission. Agathemer and even I argued and expostulated, but the doorkeeper said he had explicit orders not to admit me, and the

four big Nubians flanking the vestibule, two on a side, looked capable of using muscular force on any would-be intruder and appeared eager for a pretext for hurling themselves on me.

I climbed back into my litter.

As my men shouldered it, the doorkeeper or some one of his helpers made the mistake of unchaining the watch-dog at me.

He was a big, short-haired, black and white Aquitanian dog. He flew at the calves of my bearers, snarling, and would have bitten them badly had I not half rolled, half fallen from my litter, almost into his jaws; in fact, not a foot in front of him.

As all such animals always do with me, he checked, cowered, fawned and then exhibited every symptom of recognition, delight and affection. I patted him, pulled his ears, smoothed his spine and climbed back into my litter. The dog took his place under it as naturally as if I had raised him from a puppy and kept neatly underneath it, all the way to the Satronian Mansion.

There, at sight of me, as I descended from my litter, the doorkeeper loosed his big fawn-colored Molossian hound at me. And he came in silence, but his lips wrinkled off his teeth, swift as a lion and looking in fact as big as a yearling lioness and not unlike one in outline and color.

The Aquitanian from under the litter flew at him with a snarl, the Molossian replied with a louder snarl, the two dogs clinched and tore each other, snarling, and hung to each other, worrying and growling and snarling, to the delight of my bearers.

Out of the Satronian mansion poured a small mob of footmen, lackeys and such house-slaves. But not one dared approach the two dogs. At a safe distance they watched the fight.

I seized the dogs, spoke to them, quieted them, separated them and when I ordered them, they lay down side by side under the litter.

I climbed in.

As my bearers shouldered the litter, the Satronian doorkeeper came forward and said truculently:

"That is our dog under your litter."

"Is he your dog?" I retorted. "Prove it! Take hold of him."

The doorkeeper tried and the Molossian snarled at him. He called the footmen to help him.

At that somehow, I both lost my temper and felt prankish.

"Chase 'em, Terror," I called. "Chase 'em, Fury!"

It was a wonder to see the Aquitanian obey, to see the Molossian obey was a portent.

Into the mansion scuttled the doorkeeper, the footmen, the lackeys, the hangers-on, the two dogs barking at their heels.

I called them off in time to forestall any lacerated ankles, and still more marvellously they obeyed instantly, checked, withdrew to under the litter and there paced, side by side, to Vedia's home.

There, also, I was denied admission, but urbanely, the porter asserting that his mistress was not at home.

While I was questioning the porter, who was becomingly respectful, a bevy of Vedian retainers, house-lackeys and other slaves, overtook me, demanding the return of the Aquitanian watchdog.

"Take him!" I said, "take him if you can!"

The boldest of them approached the dog, calling him by name and wheedlingly. When he was but a yard or so away the dog flew at his throat and almost set his fangs into it, for they snapped together a mere hand's breadth short.

The fellow recoiled and, when the dog followed like an arrow from a bow, took to his heels, his companions with him, and they ran helter-skelter down the street, the dog pursuing them to the corner of the Carinae, and returning, his tongue hanging out, his tail wagging, with all the demonstrations of a dog who feels he has done his full duty and has earned approbation.

Hardly had he returned when a band of Satronians appeared and a similar scene was enacted, with the Molossian as chief actor.

When the last Satronian had vanished round the corner of the thoroughfare I reëntered my litter and we set off for the Palace, both dogs sedately pacing side by side underneath.

At the Palace portal Agathemer had no difficulty in locating Murmex, even in the crowd which packed all approaches to that entrance. I spoke to the centurion on duty at the portal and to the head out-door usher, meaning to arrange that Murmex should be let in among the first when the commonality were admitted after the senators and knights had paid their duty to the Emperor. To my amazement the head usher looked at a list or memorandum which he had in his hand and said:

"You are Andivius Hedulio, are you not? You are to take in with you anybody you please, to the number of ten. Caesar has given special orders about you." Murmex therefore passed in with me and took up a position in the lower part of the Audience Hall, where I could send a page to summon him if my plans worked out as I hoped.

We were early and the vast public throne-room almost empty. Tanno joined me after I had stood but a short time and not long afterwards the Emperor entered, just as a fair crowd of senators had assembled.

The formal salutation began at once and I noticed that the Emperor said something personal to Vedius and that Vedius stepped out of the line of salutants and took up a position behind the Emperor on his left. Similarly he spoke to Satronius, who similarly took his station behind the Emperor on his right.

When, in the long line of my equals, in an Audience Hall now jammed to the doors, I drew near to the throne, I felt a growing embarrassment at seeing the Emperor flanked by my two enemies. But, when I made my salutation, to my amazement, the Emperor took my hand and leaned over and kissed me as if I had been a senator.

"I love you, Hedulio," he said, "and I am proud of you. I have heard very laudatory reports of you. My agents all agree in reporting that you have, in very difficult circumstances, done your utmost to avoid giving offence to any of your neighbors in Sabinum, and that, if you have given offense, it was not your fault. They also agree in reporting that, mild and peaceful as you are by disposition, you know how to defend yourself when attacked, that you are not only a bold and resolute man in a tight place, but resourceful and prompt, a hard and quick hitter, and what is more, a past master at quarter-staff play. I love brave men and good fighters. I commend you."

He turned ironically to Vedius and asked:

"Did you miss any part of what I have just said to Andivius? I meant you to hear every word of it."

Vedius, his mean face lead-gray, bowed and said:

"Your Majesty was completely audible."

Then Commodus similarly questioned Satronius. He, his big face brick-red, his eyes popping out, seemed half strangled by his efforts to speak.

"I could hear it all," he managed to say.

"You two stand facing me," Commodus commanded. "Stand on either side of Andivius."
They so placed themselves with a very bad grace.

The Emperor raised his voice.

"Come near, all you senators," he commanded. "I want all of you to hear what I am about to say and to be witnesses to it."

Everybody, senators, knights and commoners crowded as close to the throne as etiquette and the ushers would allow.

"Now listen to me," spoke Commodus. "You know I hate all sorts of official business and should greatly prefer to put my entire time and energies on athletics, horsemanship and swordsmanship, archery and other things really worth while. I make no secret of my love for the activities at which I am best and of my detestation of my duties.

"But, just because I hate my duties, it does not follow that I neglect them. A lot of you think I do. I'll show you you are not always right, nor often right. Just because I surround myself with wrestlers and charioteers and gladiators and other good fellows, not with senile self-styled philosophers, prosy and with unkempt beards and rough cloaks, as my father did, half of you think I am incapable of being serious, or haven't intellect enough to understand government or sense enough to care for the Empire.

"You are mightily mistaken. I realize the importance of my responsibilities and the magnificence of my opportunities. I hate routine, but I know well the value of our Empire and that I, as Prince of the Republic, [Footnote: See Note A.] have a bigger stake in it than any other citizen of our Republic. I am not wholly absorbed in the joys of practicing feats of strength and skill. I put more time on governing than you think.

"I am autocrat of our world, and I know how to make my influence felt when I choose. I have very positive views about fighting. Fighting has to go on, on the frontiers of the Empire. My army can keep off our foes, but it cannot kill off the Moorish and Arab and Scythian nomads, nor the hordes of the German forests and the Caledonian moors. The Marcomanni and the rest will claw at us. There must be fighting on the frontiers. It is proper that there should be fighting where necessary, on any frontier, and corpses scattered about.

"Also corpses are in place on any arena of any amphitheatre anywhere inside our frontiers; fighting inside amphitheatres is proper and seemly.

"But I will tolerate no fighting inside our frontiers outside the amphitheatres. I'll not condone any corpses on the pavement of any street or on the road of any highway or byways. I'll not permit any battles, set- tos, affrays or brawls in towns or villages or on roads. You hear me? You hear me, Vedius? You hear me, Satronius? You hear me, all of you?

"Now it so happened that I had heard of your disgraceful Sabine feud, which mars the peace of a whole countryside near Reate, and I had sent a competent and reliable agent with four assistants to investigate and report. For once luck was with me: generally my luck as a ruler is as bad as it is good for me as an athlete. It so happened that my agents had just completed their preliminary investigations and acquainted themselves with general conditions when your idiotic feud broke loose in two abductions of women, one by each side, that put my agents on their mettle. They kept awake. They are no fools. My head man has a keen scent for incipient trouble; he managed to have one of his helpers get among the ambushers in Vediamnum and another among those on your byway, Satronius. Each of these two severally heard all the talk of the ambushers with whom he mingled; so I have had a faithful report of just what the Vedian ambush meant to do to the Satronian convoy they lay in wait for and similarly of the other side. Each was waiting for a sheep; both caught a wildcat. If the men in the ambushes had had any eyes or any sense, no fight would have occurred. As it was they got no more than they deserved. Hedulio was set on without provocation and merely defended himself and his associates as any self- respecting free man would. I have no fault to find with Hedulio. I take you all to witness.

"Now that disposes of what is past. As to the future I shall tolerate no illegalities of any kind anywhere in the City, in Italy or in the Empire. You'll see. Dr. Commodus will cure this epidemic of lawlessness which afflicts the Republic. You'll see my agents run down, catch and bring to punishment the ingenious rascals who have been amusing themselves by masquerading as Imperial Messengers, scampering across the landscape for the fun

of the thing, eating lavish meals at my cost, running the legs off my best horses, lodging luxuriously in the best bed at every inn they stop at, showing forged papers, or showing none at all, using no other means than effrontery and assurance. I'll have them stopped. I'll stop them. And I'll quell, I'll squelch this outburst of banditry of which we have too much. I'll see that my agents hunt down and capture and execute these highwaymen who rob not only rich travellers, but government treasure- convoys, who even rob Imperial Messengers. A pretty state of affairs when my couriers are fair game alike for impostors and robbers. I'll make the slyest and the boldest quail at the idea of interfering with one of my despatch riders and I'll exterminate all highwaymen. I'll have no one swaggering up and down Italy, now in Liguria, now in Apulia, mocking the law and its guardians, looting as he pleases, uncatchable, untraceable, hidden and helped by mountaineers and farm-laborers and farmers, even welcomed secretly in villages and towns, acclaimed as King of the Highwaymen, until songs are made on him and sung even in Rome. He'll soon decorate a gibbet, impaled there and spiked there too. You'll see. And still less will I tolerate lawlessness among men of property and position. The past actions of you magnates I dislike. As to the future I may say that my agents were at your morning reception yesterday, Vedius, and heard and reported your covert threats to Hedulio: likewise two were at your house, Satronius, and heard and reported your open threats.

"Now I perfectly understand what you two implied. You threatened Andivius with assassination, if he returned to his estates in Sabinum or if he so much as remained in Rome.

"Beware! Be warned! Take care! I am easy-going enough, but I am Caesar and I'll brook no trenching on my personal prerogatives or my legal authority. I have the tribunician power for life, I am commissioned thereby to forbid anything in the Republic and to see to it that no magistrate or citizen oversteps the limits of what is permitted him. By your threats to Hedulio you practically arrogate to yourself the right to exile a Roman of equestrian rank. Banishment is a governmental power and a prerogative of Caesar. I'll have no magnates of such overweening behavior. I am jealous of my prerogatives, more than jealous!

"I know what you intend and what you can accomplish by your henchmen. I comprehend that hundreds of stilettos are being sharpened, up there in the Sabine Hills, and down here in the slums, for a chance at Hedulio.

"Now I can do much by legal authority and more by personal prerogative. Be quick. Pass the word swiftly to all your satellites, here and in Sabinum. Let them all know that if Andivius Hedulio dies by poison or violence or is injured by any weapon, you two at Rome and your brother at Villa Vedia and your son, Satro, at Villa Satronia, will not see

two more sunrises. I know how to enforce my will, and well you know that. Your lives are in pawn for his, let all your clansmen know in good time.

"And more: if you dare, either of you, to move against Hedulio in any court at Reate or elsewhere in Sabinum for his participation in the brawls which you fomented and he fell into, I shall see to it that not your influence dominates any trial, but evenhanded justice, jealously watched over by my best legal advisers. You know what that means to you."

The Emperor spoke with a sustained, white-hot fury and it was comical to watch Satronius and Vedius, as I did by sidelong glances when the Emperor's eyes were not on my face.

When he stopped, both magnates bowed low and each in turn expressed his loyal submissiveness.

The Emperor dismissed them with a wave of his hand. To me he said:

"That will keep you alive, Hedulio and, I trust, help you to get back into good health. Horrible bore, these small-size local matters; worse, if anything, even, than the maintenance of the Rhine frontier. I loathe all this routine. But my agents serve me pretty well. Besides putting me in touch, with all this feud idiocy they have incidentally informed me that you brought to Rome with you a son of Murmex Frugi, also a nephew of Pacideianus, and a pupil of both, who has come to Rome to try his luck at their former profession. Did you bring him here today? I hoped you would."

"I did," I answered, "and thanks to your orders, I was able to pass him in with me. He is in this hall now." "Fine!" cried the Emperor, "and how about your nine tenants, who stood by you so well in both fights. Did you bring them too?"

"I should never have so presumed," I stammered, amazed, "It would never have entered my head to ask entry here for such simple rustics. I should have anticipated your wrath had I so far forgot myself."

"Rustics," said Commodus, smiling, even grinning, "who can fight as I am told your tenants can fight are always to my mind. Bring them here tomorrow, if you like. I'll see them in the Palaestra. I'm going there today after this function is finished. Bring your swordsman there. You know the door. I have given orders to admit you in my retinue."

In the Palaestra Tanno cheerfully presented Murmex to some of his favorite prize-fighters and he stood talking with them, they appraisingly conning the son of Murmex Frugi.

Tanno and I seated ourselves well back on the middle tier of the spectators' benches and chatted until the Emperor should have returned from his dressing-room and should seem at leisure to notice us.

"You must not be too puffed up at your good luck of today," Tanno warned me.

"In fact, I advise you to be very wary and to comport yourself most modestly. You know Commodus. It has too often happened that when he has overwhelmed a courtier with favors, his very condescension seems to cause a reaction in his feelings and he becomes insanely suspicious. Respond promptly to all his suggestions, of course, but do not obtrude yourself on his notice. In particular ask no favor of him for a long time to come."

I thanked him for his advice and assured him that I most heartily agreed with his ideas.

Presently a page summoned me, and Tanno came, too.

Commodus had rid himself of his official robes and was now clad only in an athlete's tunic and soft-soled shoes. I presented Murmex and the Emperor questioned him, as to his age, his upbringing, his father's years in retirement at Nersae, as to Pacideianus and put questions about thrusts and parries designed to test his knowledge of fence.

Then he seated himself on his throne on the little dais by the fencing- floor and had Murmex called to him, made him stand by him, and asked his opinion of several pairs of fighters whom he had fence, one pair after the other.

Appearing pleased with the replies he elicited he bade Murmex go with one of the pages, rub down and change into fencing rig. While Murmex was gone he viewed more fencing by young aspirants matched against accredited Palace-school trainers.

When Murmex returned he had him matched with the best of these tiros. But, almost at once, he called to the lanista:

"Save that novice! Murmex will kill him, even with that lath sword, if you don't separate them."

He then had Murmex pitted against a succession of experts, each better than his predecessor. Murmex acquitted himself so brilliantly that Commodus cried:

"I must try this man myself."

He stood up and stepped down from the dais. Then he spent some time in selecting a pair of cornel-wood fencing-swords of equal length and weight and of similar balance, repeatedly hefting the sword he had chosen and repeatedly asking Murmex whether he was satisfied with his sword, whether it suited him; and similarly of the choice of shields.

When they faced each other they made as pretty a spectacle as I had ever seen: Murmex stocky, so burly that he did not look tall, square- shouldered, deep-chested, vast of chest-girth, huge in every dimension and yet neither heavy nor slow in his movements; Commodus tall, slender, sinewy, lithe and graceful, quick in every movement and amazingly handsome.

They had made but a few passes when Commodus exclaimed:

"You show your training: it is some fun to fence with you."

After not many more thrusts and parries he called out:

"Be on your guard! I'm going to attack in earnest."

There followed a hot burst of sword-play and when both adversaries were out of breath and stepped back and stood panting, Commodus praised Murmex highly.

"You have the best guard I have ever encountered," he said, "steady-eyed, cautious, wary yet quick too, and always with the threat of attack in your defense. You are a credit to your training."

When they stepped forward again Commodus commanded:

"Attack now, attack your fiercest and show your quality. I shall not be angry if you land on me, I shall be pleased. Do your utmost!"

After the second bout he said:

"You are most dangerous in attack. At last I have found a man really worth fencing with. You gave me all I could do to protect myself. You are a pearl!"

He looked round at the envious faces of more than two score seasoned professionals and addressed the gathering at large.

"We have here a man who is nephew of Pacideianus and son to Murmex Frugi, trained since infancy by both. No wonder he is a marvel. I have never faced a swordsman who gave me so much trouble to protect myself or who held off my attacks so easily and completely. He is the only man alive, so far as I know, really in my class as a fencer."

As he was eyeing the assembly to note their manner of receiving this proclamation his expression changed.

"Egnatius!" he called sharply. "Come here!"

Egnatius Capito came forward. Like Tanno and myself he was conspicuous since he was in his toga, most of those present being athletes and clad for practice.

"I did not notice you among your fellow senators at my levee," said the
Emperor.
"I was not there," Egnatius admitted. "I had a press of clients at my own levee this morning and reached the Palace just in time to hear what you had to say to Vedius and Satronius. I tried to catch your eye as you passed out, but you did not notice me at all."

"I had rather see you here than in the throne-room," Commodus said. "I am told that you have let your tongue run entirely too wild in talking of me lately. If I had not been also told that you had had too much wine I should animadvert on your effrontery officially. As it is I prefer to prove you wrong before these experts and gentlemen."

"Of what have I been accused?" Capito queried, steadily.

"There has been no accusation," Commodus disclaimed. "But I have been told that, at more than one dinner, you have been fool enough to say that I am only a sham swordsman, that I take a steel sword and face an adversary whose sword has a blade of lead: that it is no wonder that no one scores off me, and that I run up big scores in all my bouts."

"If I ever said anything like that," spoke Capito boldly, "I was so drunk that I have no recollection of having said it. And I am a sober man and a light drinker. Also I have never harbored such thoughts unless too drunk to know what I thought or said."

"You are cold sober now, aren't you?" Commodus queried.

"Entirely sober," Egnatius agreed.

"And you are a fencer far above the average?" he pursued.

"I have been told I have no mean skill," said Capito modestly.

"Such being the case," said Commodus, "you and I shall fence. Go with the attendants and change into fencing kit. You'll find all styles and sizes of everything needed in the dressing-rooms. First pick out a pair of cornel-wood swords, entirely to your mind."

When Capito had selected a pair of swords which suited both him and the Emperor, he went off to change. While he was gone Commodus had the armorer drill a tiny hole near the point of one sword and insert in it one of those thorn-like little steel points which are commonly used on the ends of donkey-goads.

When Capito returned he showed him the two swords. Capito looked up at him questioningly and amazedly.

"The idea is this," Commodus explained. "I mean to demonstrate my perfect ability to defend myself, as well as my dangerousness in attack. You are to use the sword with the goad point set in it; so that, if you succeed in hitting me, you will tear a long slash in my hide; for I am going to fence with you in my skin only, stark; mother-naked as I was born. I shall use the unaltered sword and you will have on your fencing-tunic, so that if I hit you, it won't hurt you nearly as much as a hit from you will hurt me.

"If you draw blood from me, I'll pay you one hundred thousand sesterces: if I fail to lay you out on the pavement, totally insensible, in three bouts, I'll pay you two hundred thousand sesterces. You can pick any lanista here to judge the fight and tell us when to separate and rest."

Capito, cool enough, indicated Murmex as referee.

"He's not a lanista," Commodus objected.

"He's Frugi's pupil," Capito maintained, "and therefore the best lanista here."

"I agree," said Commodus, and he called:

"Who's the physician on duty?"

When the official came forward he said truculently:

"Get your plasters ready and your revivers. You'll have to attend a man flat on the pavement, insensible and with a bad scalp wound, before much time has passed."

And actually, though Capito fenced well, he was no match for Commodus.

The bout was worth watching. The adversaries were just the same height and differed little in weight. Capito seemed more compact and steady; Commodus more lithe and agile. Capito was a handsome man and made a fine figure in his scanty, leek-green fencing tunic. Commodus, always vain, of his good looks, delighted in exhibiting himself totally nude, not only because he loved to shock elderly noblemen imbued with old-fashioned ideas of propriety, but also because he rightly thought himself one of the best formed men alive. He was fond of being told that he was like Hercules but, except in the paintings of Zeuxis, Hercules has always been depicted as brawnier and more mature than Commodus was then or ever became, to his last hour. To me he suggested Mercury, especially as he appears in the paintings of Polygnotus, or Apollo, as Apelles depicted him.

Besides the grace and good looks of the two, they fenced very well, Capito correctly and with good judgment, Commodus with amazing dash and originality.

Capito, though bold, was wholly unable to touch Commodus, while Commodus slashed him, even through his tunic, till his blood ran from a dozen scratches. Before the second bout was well joined Capito was felled by a blow on the head, which laid him flat and insensible, bleeding from a terrible scalp wound.

After Capito had been carried off by the attendants, the Emperor, wrapped in an athlete's blanket, talked a while to Murmex and then went off to bathe, for he bathed many times a day.

Set free, I went out and was helped into my litter. The two dogs were still by it, took their places under it as if they had belonged to me since puppyhood and under it trotted as I returned home. Once home I ate the lunch permitted me and had an hour's sound, dreamless sleep.

I woke feeling so well that I sent for Agathemer, bade him have my litter ready and told him I was going to the Baths of Titus.

Inevitably Agathemer protested that I was not well enough; naturally I insisted and, of course, I had my way.

As with court levees, I have never been able to take as a matter of course without wonder and admiration, the marvellous spectacle afforded by an assemblage of our nobility and gentry gathered for their afternoon bath in any of our splendid Thermae. Of these I hold

the Baths of Titus not only the most magnificent, which is conceded by everybody, but also I hold them the most impressive mass of buildings in Rome, both outside and inside, and surpassing in every respect every other great public building in the city. Most connoisseurs appraise the Temple of Venus and Rome as our capital's most splendid structure, but I could never bring myself to admit it superior to or even equal to the Baths of Titus. To enter this surpassing building, always congratulating myself on my right to enter the baths and use them; to be one of the courtly throng of fashionable notables resorting to them: I could never take these things as a matter of course.

Nor could I ever take as a matter of course the sight of the bulk of Rome's nobility, gentlemen and ladies together, thronging the great pools and halls or roaming about the corridors, passage-ways or galleries, all totally nude.

Social convention is an amazing factor in human life. One may say that anything fashionable is accepted and that anything unfashionable is banned. But that does not help one to explain to one's self the oddity of some social conventions.

Oddest of all our Roman social conventions is the contrast between the insistence on complete concealment of the human figure everywhere else and the universal acceptance of its display at the Thermae.

At home, if receiving guests, on the streets, at a formal dinner, at Palace levees, at the Circus games or in the Amphitheatre, a man must be wrapped up in his toga. Any exposure of too much of the left arm, of either ankle, is hooted at as bad form, is decried as indecent.

So of our ladies, on dinner sofas, on their reclining chairs in their reception rooms, in their homes, in their litters abroad, at the Amphitheatre or at the Circus games, from neck to instep they are muffled up. If one catches a glimpse of a beauty's ankle as she goes up a stair, one is thrilled, one watches eagerly, one cranes to look.

Yet one encounters the same beauty the same afternoon in a corridor of the Baths of Titus, with nothing on but a net over her elaborate coiffure and the bracelet with the key and number of the locker in which the attendant has put away her clothing and valuables and one not only cannot stare at her, one cannot look at her, not even if she accosts one and lingers for a chat.

I have pondered over this, the most singular of our social conventions, and the most mandatory and inescapable; and the more I ponder the more singular it seems.

Yet it is real, it is a fact. One meets the wives of all one's friends, the wives of all Rome's nobility, naked as they were born; they mingle with the men in the swimming pools, in the ante-rooms, in the rest-rooms, everywhere except in the shower-bath cabinets and the rubbing-down rooms; one swims with them, lounges with them, joins groups of chatting gentlemen and ladies, chats, goes off, and all the while one cannot, one simply cannot stare at a nude woman, any more than any of the women ever stares at any man.

It is a social convention. But not the less amazing, although a fact.

One not only cannot scrutinize a woman, one cannot scrutinize a group of women, even at a distance, even all the way across a swimming pool. So, hoping to encounter Vedia in the gathering, I yet could not look for her.

I had met and talked with many of my acquaintances, notably Marcus Martius and his bride Marcia.

Marcia, rosy as the inside of a sea-shell, with her gold hair confined by a net of gold wire, was a bewitching creature, if I had been able to let my eyes dwell on her.

She was as contained and slow spoken and soft-voiced as always, but she was, for her, notably complimentary as to my share in the two fights; thanked me warmly for defending her, declared that she would certainly have been carried off, either as Xantha or Greia, or as a hostage for one or the other, if I had not fought "like both the Dioscuri at once," as she phrased it.

Martius corroborated her opinion of my services to them and thanked me warmly.

Delayed by chats with friends and acquaintances, held up by distant acquaintances and even by persons hardly known to me by sight, who congratulated me on the Emperor's public championing of me against my powerful Sabine neighbors, I felt my strength ebbing and sometimes saw a gray blur between my eyes and what I looked at.

I was, in fact, so weak that I nearly fainted when, unseen in the swarm of bathers until he was close to me, I encountered Talponius Pulto, tall, handsome, disdainful, sneering and malignant as usual. From his proximity I escaped as unobtrusively as I could and as promptly.

The cold douche and a swim in the cold pool had revived me. Also, in the cold pool I had encountered Nemestronia, still personable enough at eighty-odd to mingle daily with her social world, as nude as they, and enjoy herself thoroughly. Yet, at her age, she knew

she looked better when under water, and spent most of her time in the pools. She and I did some fancy swimming together, while she questioned me about my health.

I did not spend any more time than I could help between the cold pool and the tepid pool; no more at least than importunate acquaintances exacted of me.

In the tepid pool I felt, somehow, weaker and more relaxed than at any time since I had gone out the previous morning. The effect of the Emperor's favor, the effect of the cold plunge, were wearing off: mind and body were losing tone. I swam languidly, alone, on my back and so swimming found myself about one third of the way from the upper end of the pool and about midway of its width. I was staring up at the panels of the vaulting, relishing the beauty of the color scheme, the gold rosettes brilliant against the deep blue of the soffits, set off by the red of the coffering.

So swimming and staring my eyes roamed downward to the great round-headed coved window above the gallery. The railing of the gallery had a sort of wicket in it, by which bathers could emerge one by one on to the bracket- like platform which overhung the pool at that end, for use as a take-off for a high dive.

Suddenly, on this diving-stand, poised for her dive, outlined against the window behind her, I recognized Vedia; Vedia, my angered sweetheart, rosy as Marcia, more lovely, and nude as Venus rising from the sea.

Seeing her thus, and seeing her thus unexpectedly, woke in me a volcanic outburst of conflicting emotions altogether too much for my weakened condition.

I fainted.

When I came to I felt weak and queer and did not at first open my eyes. I heard subdued voices all about me, as of an interested crowd; I felt all wet, I felt the cold of a wet mosaic pavement under me, but my head and shoulders were pillowed on a support wet indeed, as I was, but soft and warm.

I opened my eyes.

I realized that my head was in Vedia's lap, for I saw above me her dripping breasts and, higher, her anxious face looking down at mine.

I fainted again.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER VIII
THE WATER-GARDEN

Just how long I was entirely unconscious I do not know. For after I began to come to myself at intervals which grew shorter, for periods which grew longer, I was too weak to move a muscle or to utter a syllable. I lay, flaccid, in my big, deep, soft bed, very dimly aware of Occo or of Agathemer hovering about me, generally recalled to consciousness by an eggspoonful of hot spiced wine being forced through my slow-opening lips and teeth.

How many times I was sufficiently conscious to know that I was being fed, but too ill for any thoughts whatever, I cannot conjecture. When I began to have mental feelings the first was one of dazed confusion of mind, of groping to recollect where I was and why and what had last happened to me.

When I recalled my last waking experience I lay bathed in sleepy contentment. I could think connectedly enough to reason out, or my unthinking intuitions presented to me without my thinking, the conviction that, if Vedia could recognize me in a big pool among scores of swimmers, if her perceptions in regard to me were acute enough and quick enough for her and her alone to notice that I had fainted in the water, if she cared enough for me and was sufficiently indifferent to what society might say of her, for her to rescue me and sit down on the pavement of the tepidarium and pillow my wet head on her wet thighs till I showed signs of life, I need not worry about whether Vedia cared for me or not. I was permeated with the conviction that, however difficult it might be to get her to acknowledge it, however great or many might be the obstacles in the way of my marrying her, Vedia loved me almost as consumedly as I loved her.

In this frame of mind I convalesced steadily, if slowly, incurious of the flight of time, of news, of anything; content to get well whenever it should please the gods and confident that happiness, even if long deferred, was certain to follow my recovery.

After I could talk to Occo and Agathemer and seemed to want to ask questions, which both of them discouraged, one morning, on wakening for the second time, after a minute allowance of nourishment and a refreshing nap, I found Galen by my bedside.

He looked me over and asked questions, as physicians invariably do, concerning my bodily sensations. After he seemed satisfied he asked:

"My son, were you ever ill before you were hit on the head in your recent affrays?"

"Never that I remember," I answered.

"I judge so," he said. "If you had not been blessed with the very best physique and constitution you would have died in your friend's litter on the Salarian Highway. Thanks to your general strength and healthiness, and thanks, to some extent, to my care and that of my colleagues, you are alive and on the way to complete, permanent recovery and to long life with good health. But you very nearly committed suicide when you went out and about contrary to my orders. I say all this solemnly, for I want you to remember it. If you disobey again, you will, most likely, be soon buried. If you obey you have every chance of getting so well that you can safely forget that you ever were ill.

"But, until I tell you that you are well, do not forget that you are ill."

"I shall remember," I said, "and I shall be scrupulously obedient."

"Good !" he ejaculated. "I infer that you find life worth living."

"Very well worth living," I rejoined devoutly.

"Then listen to me," he said. "You must remain abed until I tell you to get up; when you first get up, it must be for only an hour or so. You must not attempt to go out until I give you permission. You must not risk eating such meals as you are used to. You must take small amounts of specified foods at stated intervals. Agathemer will see to all that, with Occo to help him. Do you promise to acquiesce?"

"I promise," I said.

"Remember," he cautioned me, "that the number, variety and severity of the blows rained on you in your two fights were so great that you were almost beaten to death. You had no bones broken, but the injury to your muscles and ligaments was sufficient to kill a man only ordinarily strong, while the blows affecting your kidneys, liver and other internal organs were in themselves, without the bruising of all your surface, enough to cause death. I had you convalescing promptly and rapidly; you went out and overstrained all your vitalities. Your recklessness almost ended you. You were far nearer death in your relapse than at first, and that is saying a great deal. If you obey me you will certainly recover. If you disobey you will probably kill yourself."

"I shall take all that to heart," I said. "I have promised to be docile:
I'll keep my word and obey my slaves as if every day were the Saturnalia."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You are getting better."

He looked me over again and asked:

"Is there anything you want?"

"I want to see Tanno," I said.

"You shall the day after tomorrow," he promised, "or perhaps tomorrow, if I find you improving faster than I anticipate."
Actually, after a brief visit from him the next day, Tanno was ushered into my sick-room.

My first question was about my tenants. Not one such tenant-farmer in a million would ever have a chance of being personally presented to Caesar. They had been awestruck when I told them of their amazing good fortune. They had said almost nothing. But I knew that they were, all nine of them, as nearly rapt into ecstasy as Sabine farmers could be at the prospect of personally saluting Caesar in his Palace, in his Audience Hall on his throne. I had been too inert to worry about anything, but I almost worried at the thought of their disappointment, through my relapse.

Tanno told me that he, knowing the Emperor's character pretty well, had taken it upon himself to have them passed in with him as the Emperor had ordered, and had himself asked permission to present them and had presented them. The next day, he said, everyone of them had returned home.

I heaved a deep sigh of relief: my tenants and my Sabine Estate were off my mind; I might be entirely easy about all things in Sabinum.

He then told me what a brilliant success Marcia was among the pleasure- loving, novelty-loving, luxurious high-living set in our city society.

"Since the enforcement of the old-fashioned laws relaxed and became a dead letter and some were even repealed," he said, "not a few men of equestrian rank have married freed-women and such occurrences no longer cause any scandal or much remark. But the results are not generally productive of any social success for the ill-assorted pair.

"I have known a few freedwomen married to men of wealth, and equestrian rank, who gained some vague approximation of social standing among the wives of their husbands' friends. But Marcia is the first freedwoman I ever knew or heard of to be treated, by everybody and at once, as if she had been freeborn and since birth in her husband's

class. Martius has not brought this about, or aided much; he is a good enough fellow, but he has no social qualities; for all the power he has of attracting friends he might as well be an archaic statue. Marcia has done it all. She's a wonder."

Then he told me of Murmex: how he was already rated Rome's champion swordsman; how the Palace Palaestra was jammed with notables eager to see him fence, how magnates competed for invitations to such exhibitions, how Murmex was overwhelmed with attentions of all kinds from all sorts of people, had had a furnished apartment put at his disposal by one admirer, a litter and bearers presented him by another, already saw his domicile crowded with presents of statuary, paintings, furniture, flowers and all possible gifts, how he was an immediate and brilliant success with all classes, even the populace talking of him, crowding behind his litter, and demanding him for the next public exhibition of gladiators.

That such luck had befallen a man whom I had presented to Court augured well for me, indubitably.

After I had been out of bed an hour or more for several consecutive days
Galen said to me:
"You are almost well enough to be about, but not quite. If you go back to your habitual hours of sleep you will fret and fidget indoors, and you are not yet sufficiently recovered to resume your normal life. You need fresh air. I have considered what is best and what is possible. I have talked with your friend Opsitius. Through him I have arranged for you to have short outings in this manner. On fair days if you feel like going out you may call for your litter. In it you must keep the panels closed and the curtains drawn. Agathemer will give your bearers directions. Nemestronia has offered you the use of her lower garden. You are to have it all to yourself, whenever you want it, as long as my directions to Agathemer permit you to remain in it; and you need not remain a moment unless you enjoy being there."

I understood without asking any questions. Nemestronia's palace was one of the most desirable, magnificent and spacious abodes in Rome. Her father, who had been accustomed to say that he was too great a man to have to live in a fashionable neighborhood, that any neighborhood in which he settled would thereby become fashionable, had bought a very generous plot of land nearly on the crest of the Viminal Hill and had there built himself a dwelling which was at once noted among the dozen finest private dwellings in the Eternal City. In one respect it was preëminent. From its lofty position it had, down the slope of the hill, a wide view over the city and this view was unobstructed, for below his palace Nemestronius had had laid out six separate gardens, two large and four small. Next the house the ground fell away so sharply that he had been able to create a terraced garden, the only private terraced garden in Rome,

extending across the entire rear of his palace and with three terraces, from the uppermost of which the view was almost as good as from the upper windows of the mansion. Below this, each extending along but half the length of the terraces, was a grass-garden, where it was possible to play ball-games, it being a mere expanse of sward shut in by high walls covered with flowering vines; and a formal garden, in the fashionable style. Below the grass- garden was one of similar size, all flower-beds, to supply roses, lilies, violets and other staple blossoms for his banqueting-hall, below the formal garden was one called the wild-garden or shrubbery-garden, like the grass-garden in being covered with sward almost from wall to wall, but unlike it, in that it had four shade trees, no two alike, and many flowering shrubs of all kinds and sizes. Lastly below these two was the water-garden, the same size as the terraced garden, taken up with fountains and pools, and all gay in season, with the flowers which thrive in or beside ponds and pools. It had also eight beautiful lotus trees.

High walls, through which one might pass from one to the other only by gates generally shut fast, separated and enclosed these gardens, for their creator's intention was to enjoy the peculiar charm of each undistracted by the contrasting charms of the others. From the upper gardens it was possible to see, to some extent, into those lower down the hill; but, from the lower, one could see nothing of those above.

One side of the property was flanked by a street, a mere narrow, walled lane on which no dwelling opened. Along this were posterns in the wall, giving access to or exit from the terrace-garden, the formal-garden, the wild-garden and the water-garden.

I understood at once what I later heard from Agathemer. The water-garden was to be mine for my airings. I was to leave my litter at its postern in the unfrequented lane and reenter my litter there.

There I went next day and revelled in the beauty of the garden, in the sunshine, in the breeze and in the sensations of returning health and strength which inundated me. There I went for some days in succession similarly.

On the eighth day before the Kalends of August Galen came to see me, not early in the morning, but about the bath-hour of the afternoon. He seemed well pleased with his inspection of me and with my answers to his questions.

"You are practically well," he said, "and much sooner than I anticipated. I am tempted to tell you to return to your normal routine of meals, eating what you please; and to give you permission to resume your usual social activities But I think it better, in a case like yours, to wait a month too long rather than to be a day too soon. So I shall enjoin an

adherence to your diet and a continuance of your long rest hours and brief outings for some days yet."

He had me summon Agathemer and repeated to him much of what he had said to me.

"He might go out at once," he said, "but we had best be cautious. Limit him to morning outings in Nemestronia's gardens. He may, however, see friends, one at a time, according to his wishes and your directions. And be particular as to his diet. Give him more of each viand at each feeding. Feed him as soon as he wakes. Then time the feedings two hours apart. Are your clepsydras [Footnote: water-clocks] good?"

"Of the best," I interjected. "My uncle was a fancier of time-keepers and had one in every room, and no two alike in ornamentation, all beautifully decorated."

"The ornamentation doesn't matter," said Galen, impatiently. "Do they keep time with anything approaching accuracy?"

"As near accuracy," I said, "as any clepsydras ever made."

"Well," he said, "clepsydras always work better when nearly full than when nearly empty. When you feed him have a full clepsydra handy and start it when he begins to eat. Then by it feed him again after two hours. Keep to that interval and to the diet I have enjoined."

Next day I spent over three hours in Nemestronia's water-garden, Tanno with me for most of the time. Twice, during the chat, Agathemer brought me a tray with the drink and food enjoined for that hour of the day. Each time I left not a drop or crumb: I was ravenous.

The following morning Agathemer let in to me, in that same garden, Murmex Lucro, who thanked me for my good offices with Commodus and narrated his triumphal progress of professional and social success ever since I had seen him fence with the Emperor.

Agathemer did not permit Murmex to linger long, saying that it was against Galen's orders. After I was alone and had eaten what he brought I basked and idled happily, thinking of Vedia, entirely unruffled by the fact that I had had no missive or message from her, considering her silence merely discreet and judicious after her spectacular rescue of me in the Tepidarium, and confident of seeing her as soon as I was entirely well.

While I was in this mood my hostess came to chat with me. Nemestronia, at eighty-odd, was as dainty and charming an old lady as the sun ever shone on. And as lovable as any woman alive. I loved her dearly, as all Rome loved her dearly, and I ranked myself high among her countless honorary grandsons, for her motherly ways made her seem an honorary grandmother to all young noblemen whom she favored.

After a heart-warming chat she said:

"I must go now, by Galen's orders. Before I go I want to ask you whether you are coming here tomorrow?"

"Certainly!" I cried, looking about me with delight. "Could there, can there, be in Rome a more Elysian spot in which to feel health being restored to one?"

She beamed at me.

"Be sure to be here," she said. "You will not regret coming."

Between naps that afternoon and before I slept that night I soothed myself with the hope that I was, by Nemestronia's influence, to have an interview with Vedia.

Next morning the weather was beautiful, the sky clear, the air neither too cool nor too warm, the breeze soft and steady. Nemestronia's water-garden appeared to me even more delightful than the day before. I admired the lotus trees, the water-lily pads in the pools, the jets of the fountains, the bright strips of flowers along the pools, particularly some water- flags or some flowers resembling water-flags.

I was idling in the sun on a cushion which Agathemer had arranged for me on a marble seat against the upper wall, nearly midway of the garden, but in sight of the postern gate by which I had entered. So idling and dreaming day dreams I let my eyes rove languidly about the scene before me. While meditating and staring at the pavement at my feet I heard footsteps on the walk and looked up.

To my amazement I saw Egnatius Capito approaching.

No wonder I was amazed. I knew him but slightly. I should never have thought of asking to see him, as I had asked to be allowed to see several of my semi-intimates. Agathemer had insisted that I postpone seeing them, because an interview with any of them was likely to overtire me. I knew that no one could have entered that garden without Agathemer's knowledge. I could not conceive how Capito came to be there.

He greeted me formally and asked permission to seat himself beside me. I gave it rather grudgingly.

He asked after my health and I answered only less grudgingly.

"I conjecture," he said, "that you are surprised to see me here?"

"I am surprised," I said shortly.

"Will you permit me to explain?" he asked courteously.

I could not be less courteous than he and signified my assent.

"Your secretary," he said, "is of the opinion that your illness, while caused by your injuries in the affrays into which you were entrapped, was greatly intensified by your chagrin at finding yourself embroiled with both the Vedian and Satronian clans, and he also thinks that brooding over the condition of affairs has delayed your recovery."

"I assumed all that," I interrupted, "but I cannot conceive why he has talked to you about it."

Capito was always ingratiating. He gazed at me reproachfully, gently, winningly.

"If I have your permission," he said, "I shall explain."

"Explain!" I cried impatiently.

"Agathemer," he went on, "has left no stone unturned to find some means for placating both clans and for reconciling you with both. In pursuit of this aim he has been cautious, discreet, tactful and secret. He has covertly tried many plans of approach. It was intimated to him, truly, that I had on foot a scheme which promised to succeed in reconciling both clans with each other and he rightly inferred that I might be able to arrange for reconciling both with you at the same time. I am confident that I can, as I told him when he tentatively approached me and unostentatiously sounded me on this matter. I told him that it was only necessary that I have an interview with you as soon as might be. Believing that an early dissipation of your embroilment would conduce to your quick and complete recovery he arranged for me to meet you as I have."

While he was saying this my eyes roved about the garden. To my astonishment I saw a man standing against the shut postern door, intently regarding us as we sat on the marble seat conferring. In my half convalescent state I had become used to acquiescence

in anything and everything, I was inert mentally and physically and my perceptive faculties dulled and slow as were my intellectual processes. While hearkening to Capito I gazed at the man uncomprehendingly, only half conscious. I thought him a queer-looking fellow to be in Capito's retinue; he did not look like a slave, but like a free man of the lowest class. I did not recognize him, yet it seemed to me that I should; I did not like the way he looked at us, yet I said nothing. He seemed to see me looking at him, opened the postern, stepped through it and shut it after him. As he went I was shot through with the conviction that I had seen him somewhere before.

"If you have in you," I said to Capito, "any such supernatural powers as you would need for success in what you aim at, if you have any reasons for anticipating success, Agathemer was fully justified in what he has done. If you can really accomplish what you seem to believe you can accomplish, I shall be grateful to you to the last breath I draw. But I am skeptical. Speak on. Convince me."

"I must first," he said, "have your pledge of secrecy for what I am about to say."

"What sort of secrecy?" I queried, repelled and suspicious.

"If I am to disclose what I wish to disclose," he said, "you must give me your word not to reveal by word, look, act or silence anything I may make known to you, from your pledge until the termination of our interview."

I was uneasy, but curious. I gave my pledge as he asked.

He looked about, warily. He leaned closer to me. He spoke in a subdued tone.

"It must be known to you," he said, "that many of us nobles, many men of equestrian rank, many senators, are gravely anxious concerning the Republic, gravely dissatisfied with the character and behavior, I might say the misbehavior, of our present Prince."

"I don't wonder that you pledged me to secrecy," I blurted out. "You are talking treason."

"Hear me to the end," he begged, "and you will find that I am talking not treason but patriotism."

I grunted and he went on.

"Many of us are of the opinion that the Republic, which was never as prosperous as within the past eighty years, is in grave danger of losing much of its Empire, so gloriously extended by Trajan, so well maintained by his three successors, if it continues

to be neglected and mismanaged as it is. To save the commonwealth and retain its provinces we must have a Caesar competent, diligent, discreet and brave; and not one of these epithets can be properly applied to the autocrat now in power. We feel that he must be removed and that there must be substituted for him a ruler who is all that the State needs and has the right to expect."

"Fine words," I said. "Masking a conspiracy to assassinate our Emperor."

He looked shocked and pained.

"Hear me out," he pleaded.

"I am curious, I confess," I admitted, "to learn what all this has to do with reconciling Vedius and Satronius and regaining me the good graces of both. I ought to terminate the interview, but I am weak. Go on."

"Naturally," he said, "both Vedius and Satronius resent what the Emperor did and said concerning your entanglement in their feud and they are both infuriated at their humiliation and at the effective means he took to tie their hands as far as concerns you and to ensure your safety, as far as they were concerned."

"Commodus," I interrupted, "is not altogether a bungler when he gives his mind to the duties of his office."

"May I go on?" Capito enquired, mildly, even reproachfully and, I might say, irresistibly. He was a born leader of a conspiracy, for few men could be alone with him and not fall under his influence.

"Go on," I said. "I am consumed with curiosity to discover how their rage at the Emperor could lead to a reconciliation between them."

"It is not obvious, I admit," he said, "but when I explain, you will see how naturally, how inevitably a reconciliation might be expected to result.

"You have seen, perhaps often, a peasant or laborer beating his wife?"

"Everybody has," I replied. "What has that to do with what you were talking of?"

"Be patient!" he pleaded. "You have seen some bystander interfere in such a domestic fracas?"

"Often," I agreed.

"You have also seen," he continued, "not only the husband turn on the outsider, but the wife join her spouse in attacking her would-be rescuer, have seen both trounce the interloper and in their mutual help forget their late antagonism."

"Certainly," I agreed.

"Well," he pursued, "human nature, male or female, low-life or high-life, is the same in essence. Vedius and Satronius are so incensed with Caesar for balking their appetite for revenge on you that they are thirsting for revenge on Caesar and ready to forget all their hereditary animosities and join in abasing him. In fact, they have joined the league of patriots of which I am the leader. And they are so bent on their new purpose that they are ready to be hearty friends to anyone sworn as our confederate. I can arrange to obliterate, even to annihilate forever, all trace of enmity between you and either of them, if you will but agree to let your natural inherent patriotism overcome all other feelings in your heart and aid us to abolish the shame of our Republic and to safeguard the Commonwealth and the Empire."

All this while I had been half listening to him, half occupied in trying to recall where I had seen the man who had stepped through the postern. At this instant, as Capito paused, I suddenly realized that he was the immobile horseman whom we had twice passed in the rain by the roadside the morning I had started from my villa for Rome. His hooked nose was unmistakable.

Somehow this realization, along with the recollection of what Tanno had said of the fellow, woke me to a sense of the danger to which I was exposed by being with Capito and also to a sense of the craziness of his ideas and plans.
I felt my face redden.
"You have said enough!" I cut him short. "I perfectly understand. You think yourself the destined savior of Rome and the deviser of priceless plans for Rome's future. You are not so much a conspirator as a lunatic. Your schemes are half idiocy, half moonshine. I have pledged you my word to be secret as to what you have told me. My pledge holds if you now keep silent, rise from this seat and walk straight out to your litter, by the same way by which you came from it. If you utter another syllable to me, if you do not rise promptly, if you hesitate about going, if you linger on your path, I'll call my litter, I'll go straight to the Palace, I'll ask for a private audience, I'll wait till I get one, I'll tell the Emperor every word you have said to me. If you want protection for yourself from my pledge, leave me. Go!"

He gave one glance at me and went.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. I BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER IX
THE SQUALL OF THE LEOPARD

When he was gone, when I had seen the postern door shut behind him, I felt suddenly weak and faint. I was amazed to find how exhausted I was left by the ebbing of the hot wave of indignation and rage which had surged through me as I revolted from his absurd and contemptible proposals. I felt flaccid and limp.

At this instant Agathemer brought me a tray of food. My impulse was to burst out at him with reproaches for having, without consulting me, presumed to arrange for me an interview with a man not among my intimates. But I was so enraged that I dreaded the effect on me, in my weakened state, if I let myself go in respect to rebuking my slave. I kept silent and was mildly surprised to find myself tempted by the food. I ate and drank all that was on the tray, and Agathemer vanished noiselessly, without a word.

I sat there, revived by the food and wine, feeling the weakness caused by my rage gradually passing off and meditating on the sudden change in my condition. Before Capito accosted me I had felt perfectly well and was looking forward to resuming my normal life next day, to going to the Palace Levee, to enjoying a bath with my acquaintances at the Thermae of Titus. Since Capito had left me I had felt so overcome that I was ready to look forward to some days yet of strict regimen and isolation.

Thus meditating I was again aware of footsteps on the walk.

I looked up and was more amazed than when I had caught sight of Capito. Approaching me, but a few paces from me, was one of the most detestable bores in Rome, a man whom I sedulously avoided, Faltonius Bambilio. His father, the Pontifex of Vesta, was an offensively and absurdly unctuous and pompous man. His son, who had already held several minor offices in the City Government, had been one of the quaestors the year before, and so was now a senator. But he was, as he always had been, as he remained, a booby. I do not believe that there was any man in Rome I detested so heartily.

He greeted me as if he had a right to my notice and said:

"I was told that Egnatius Capito was in this garden."

"He was," I replied curtly, "but he has left it."

"I certainly am disappointed," he said, seating himself by me, uninvited.
"I particularly wanted to speak to Capito at once."
"You might find him at his house," I suggested.

But Bambilio was impervious to suggestions.

"I wanted to talk to him and you together," he said, "but that can be managed some other time."

I was about to reply tartly, but I remembered how my irritation with Capito had affected me and recalled Galen's injunction that I must avoid all causes of excitement and emotion. I held my peace.

Bambilio, as if he had been an intimate and had been specially invited, lolled comfortably on the bench and gazed approvingly about.

"Fine garden, Andivius," he said. "Fine trees, fine flowers and I say, what a jewel of a slave-girl, eh! Hedulio!"

I could have hit him, I was so incensed at his familiarity, I was already choking with internal rage at Agathemer for having let anyone in to talk to me in that garden, still more at his having done so without consulting me and most of all that after doing so he had not made sure that no one but Capito could pass the postern door. But I almost exploded into voluble wrath when I looked where he indicated, saw a pretty, shapely young woman in the scanty attire of a slave-girl picking flag-flowers into a basket she carried, and recognized Vedia. That Agathemer's presumption should have spoiled the interview with Vedia which she and Nemestronia had manifestly arranged for us, that it should have exposed Vedia in her undignified disguise to recognition by the greatest ass and blatherskite in the senate, this infuriated me till I felt internally like Aetna or Vesuvius on the verge of eruption.

Vedia, for it was she, had evidently been approaching me circuitously, hoping to be noticed and hailed from afar. Now when she was near enough for not merely a lover but for any acquaintance to recognize her, she looked up at me over her basket as she laid a flower-stalk in it.

Instantly her face flamed, she turned away and went on picking flowers diligently. After she had moved a few steps she sprang into the path and scampered off like a child, her basket swinging, vanishing through a door in the upper wall on my left.

"Neat little piece!" Bambilio commented. "Taking, and every part of her pretty. Fine calves, especially."

I was by this time in a condition which, had I been old and fat, must have brought on an apoplexy. But my hot rage cooled to an icy haughtiness, and, though it took a weary, tedious long time, I kept my temper and my demeanor, look, tone and word, managed to convey to him, even through the thick armor of his self-conceit, that he was not welcome. He rose, said farewell and waddled off to the postern. As soon as he was outside, more rapidly than I had moved since I was felled in the roadside affray, I walked to that door and made sure that it was bolted.

I was strolling unhurriedly back to the seat I had left and was perhaps half way to it, when I heard, loud and clear, the long-drawn, blood- curdling hunting-squall of Nemestronia's pet leopard; heard in it more of menace, more of adult ferocity, more of the horrible joy of the power to kill than I had ever heard before.

Instantly I comprehended what had happened. Either Agathemer when he took off my tray or Vedia when she escaped had passed through the wild-garden (probably it had been Vedia, who would not know that the leopard was confined there), and had left a door imperfectly closed. The leopard, which might have been asleep, under the shrubberies and invisible, had roused and had passed through the unfastened door up into the terrace- garden. This was the kind of morning on which Nemestronia would have many visitors, the kind of weather which would tempt them to have their chairs out on the upper terrace, the hour of the morning at which they would be most likely to be out there. The leopard, I instantly inferred, was stalking, not some hare, porker, kid or lamb, but her owner and her owner's guests.

I disembarrassed myself of my outer garments, threw off my sun-hat, and, clad only in my shoes and tunic, sprinted for the door into the wild- garden, through it, through its upper door, which, as I had forecasted, I found open, and out on the lower terrace. From there I could not see anything on the upper terrace, but, as I cleared the door, I heard again, rising, quavering, sinking, rising, the leopard's hunting cry from the upper terrace. I sprang up the stair to the middle terrace, and half way up that to the upper; but, when my head was about on a level with the pavement of the walk along the upper terrace, I checked myself and moved a hairs-breadth at a time; for the rescue on which I had come was a delicate task and any quick movement might precipitate the leopard's killing- spring.

Through the spaces between the yellow Numidian marble balusters I saw what I had anticipated. Partly under the big middle awning, but mostly out in front of it on the walk, were set a score of light chairs. On those furthest out were seated nine ladies:

Nemestronia, Vedia, Urgulania, Entedia, Aemilia Prisca, Magnonia, Claudia Ardeana, Semnia, Papiria and Cossonia. They were rigid in their chairs, white with terror and yet afraid to move a muscle. Belly flat on the walk, about twelve paces from them, crouched the leopard, moving forward a paw at a time. As I gained a view of her she emitted a third squall.

I saw that I was in time and felt so relieved that I almost fainted in the revulsion from my agony of anxiety. As I began to move my mind was free enough to wonder how Vedia had found time to change from her slave-girl disguise into a bewitching fashionable toilet. Among those leaders of Roman society, the very pick of Rome's noblewomen, she showed her best and outshone them all.

I moved evenly and steadily up the steps and along the balustrade till I was past the crouching leopard and then on round till I was in her line of sight and half between her and her victims.

She recognized me at once, the evil switching of her tail ceased, she half rose; she began to purr, a purr that sounded to me as loud as the roar of a water-fall in a gorge; she took a few steps towards me, then, suddenly, she made a peculiar movement hard to describe, something like the curvetting of a mettlesome colt, but characteristic of a leopard and therefore like the movement of no other animal save a leopard or lion or tiger; she leapt daintily clear of the pavement and struck sideways with her forepaws. The antic perfectly expressed playful delight and friendliness.

I recognized her mood and knew that I had not only distracted her from her bloodthirst but had her entire attention. I knew what I must do, but I raged at the ridiculous exhibition which I must make of myself before the most fastidious and conventional of Rome's noblewomen. Yet, if I was to save them, I must not hesitate. I threw myself flat on my side on the pavement and made clawing motions with my hands and feet, the leopard responded to my suggestion, capered again as before and, when close to me, lay down before me on the pavement and began to paw at me, purring loudly in her throat, now and then snarling softly. She played with me as she had often played before, all her claws sheathed and her paws soft as thistledown; mumbling my hands and forearms in her hot mouth, slavering over them, yet never so much as bruising the skin with her needle-sharp teeth. Yet I seemed to detect a subtle difference in her mood and, from moment to moment, dreaded that she might claw me to ribbons or sink her fangs in my shoulders or face.

All the while she was mouthing, pawing and kicking me I was raging at Agathemer for having put me in a position where I had to make so undignified an exhibition of myself before such an assemblage.

Presently I recognized that alteration in her mood which made it possible for me to rise, take her by the scruff of the neck, and lead her off to her cage.

When I had her inside I realized how hot, sweaty, dusty tousled, rumpled and mussed I was. Her cage was under the vaulted arcade beneath the second terrace. I was, when I shot its bolts, altogether out of sight of Vedia, Nemestronia and the other noble ladies who had been spectators of my tussle with the leopard. I did not want them to see me again in my dishevelled and dirty condition: I sneaked into the house by the passage from the arcade into the cellars and up the scullery stairs, made the first slave I saw escort me to the guest-room I usually occupied when at Nemestronia's and bade him summon bath-attendants and dressers. Nemestronia had a store-room lined with wardrobes of men's attire containing every sort of garment of every style and size. I was soon clean and clad as a gentleman should be in a fresh tunic and in the garment I had left in the water-garden, which a footman had fetched for me.

Then I went out on the upper terrace.

There I found the nine ladies, with some maids and waiters. Before the ladies, facing Nemestronia, stood Agathemer; behind and about him Nemestronia's six big, husky, bull-necked slave-lashers, the two head- lashers with their many-lashed scourges.

I realized at once what had happened. Nemestronia had needed no one to inform her that it was through Agathemer's negligence or mismanagement that the leopard had escaped from the wild-garden. She had not waited to ask me to investigate the matter and punish my slave. She had, like the great noblewoman she was, assumed my acquiescence and approval and summoned and questioned Agathemer. Before I appeared his answers had convicted him. She did not look round at me as I joined the group and seated myself in a vacant chair on her left, between Vedia and Claudia Ardeana. As I seated myself she gave the order:

"Strip him and give him a hundred lashes!"

Now, then and there I found myself in the most cruel and painful situation I had ever been in my life. Agathemer and I had been playmates almost from our cradles; comrades, cronies, chums all our lives. Neither of us had ever had a brother. Each had been, since infancy, a brother to the other. I could not have loved a real brother any more than I loved Agathemer, nor could he have had more implicit confidence in the goodwill of a blood brother. I was, in fact, as solicitous for Agathemer's welfare as for my own, and I rejoiced with his joys and mourned with his griefs. I would have done

anything to protect him and save him, as he had faithfully and tirelessly nursed and cared for me in my illness.

But I knew that no explanations could ever make Nemestronia understand our mutual relations or accept my views of them; to her a slave was a slave; she felt as unalterable a gulf between free man and slave as between mankind and cattle. I could only let her have her way, though I was inundated with misery at the thought of Agathemer's approaching agonies. I had been hotly wrathful with him and had meditated, as I dressed, what sort of punishment would befit his fault: now that Nemestronia had ordered him flogged my resentment against him had all oozed out of me and I was filled with sympathy for him and scorn of my cowardice in not protecting him. I glanced at him as the lashers stripped and bound him. He sent back at me a glance which said, as plain as words:

"I am to blame. I know you are sorry for me. But give no sign, I must go through this alone."

And I had to sit there while the head-lasher flogged him till the pavement on which he lay was all a pool of gore, till his back was in tatters from neck to hips, till he was carried off, insensible, perhaps dead.

Also I had to express my approbation of Nemestronia's orders, and had to sit there and chat with the ladies, seven of whom were inclined to be facetious over the figure I had cut sprawling on the mosaic walk, tussling with that abominable leopard. They thanked me for saving their lives, or at least, the life of some one of them. But they were sly about my comical appearance while the leopard mauled and tousled me.

Two did not speak.

Vedia was cold and mute and spoke only when she rose, excusing herself to
Nemestronia and calling for her litter first of them all.
Nemestronia was so weak from the reaction after her fright and so unwilling to display her weakness that she hardly spoke, limiting herself to the brief words courtesy demanded.

When I reached home I forgot everything else in my solicitude for Agathemer. I not only called for my own physician, but sent urgent messages summoning Galen and Celsianus. Celsianus was affronted at the suggestion that he stoop to prescribe for a slave and incensed at having been called in haste for such a trifle: but Galen, who came in while Celsianus was expressing his indignation, diverted his mind at once by rejoicing that I was sufficiently recovered to take that much interest in one of my slaves. He made haste

to see, inspect and assist Agathemer: when he was somewhat relieved and we had left him abed with Occo to watch him and with injunctions that quiet was the best medicine for him, Galen turned to me.

"You have had a shock," he said, "and a superabundance of excitement. Tell me all about it."

When I had told him what had happened, omitting only Vedia's disguise and her presence in the water-garden, he said:

"I certainly should not have prescribed any such excitements and efforts as medicaments for a case like yours. But it sometimes happens that being startled accomplishes more towards a cure than long rest can. Your perturbation of mind and activity of body has cured you. You are, as far as I can judge, well. I am of the opinion that you may safely eat and drink what you like in moderation, rest only as you please and may resume your normal life."

I was, naturally, much pleased, but had no impulse to resume my habits that day. I kept indoors, denied myself to all visitors, slept long after Galen had left, ate a moderate dinner and went early to bed.

Next day I went through the normal routine of a Roman of my rank. The story of the leopard had been noised about and the husbands of the ladies concerned every one came to salute me at my morning reception and to thank me for my miraculous intervention, as they called it. As six of the eight were senators my atrium had an aspect seldom seen at the reception of a man of equestrian rank.

At the Palace I found the tale of the leopard had reached the ears of the
Emperor. He congratulated me, saying:
"You are not only a good fighter, Hedulio, but also incredibly bold and marvellously favored by the gods."

Tanno was at the Palace to say farewell for the summer, as he was off for
Baiae to enjoy the scenery and sea-breezes.
"I envy you," said Commodus. "I must remain, here many days yet to get rid of the most pressing matters on my crowded files of official papers."

After the Palace levee was over I went to Vedia's mansion and tried to see her, but was rebuffed, the porter declaring that, by her physician's orders, she was denying herself to all visitors.

At home I found Agathemer still suffering terribly, but without fever, with no sign of proud flesh anywhere on his flayed back and not only entirely able to talk to me but eager to do so. We had a long talk on the entire subject of our peculiar relations as a master and slave who were more like brothers. He assured me that I had done just right to act as I had and he begged my pardon for his blunders in arranging to have Capito admitted to talk to me, in arranging it without my permission or even knowledge, in neglecting to guard the outer door of the garden and so admitting Bambilio, and in causing the escape of the leopard. I heartily forgave him, told him to forget all that, that I forgot it all and, on my side, begged his forgiveness for his agonies. He said there was nothing to forgive: that my uncle's injunctions had compelled my leaving him a slave and the rest had been his fault, not mine.

I told him that I would do anything in my power to make him well, comfortable and happy, except setting him free, from which I was restrained by my uncle's behests.

He asked to be allowed to return to Villa Andivia as soon as the physicians pronounced him fit to travel.

I agreed: commanded that my travelling carriage, which Marcus Martius had returned to me, should be put in order and prepared for the journey; and consulted Galen, who came of his own accord to see Agathemer two days in succession. On his third visit he gave Agathemer permission to travel by carriage the next day and he accordingly set off for Villa Andivia on the Ides of August.

Each day I had spent most of my afternoon at the Baths of Titus. Each afternoon I had seen Vedia at a distance, but she had always taken pains to avoid me, and one cannot pursue or seem to pursue, a lady in the Thermae.

Each day, also, I had called to see her at her house; each day I had been rebuffed. On the morning of the nineteenth day before the Kalends of September one of the runners brought me a letter. It read:

"Vedia gives greetings to Andivius. If you are well I am well also."

But this formal opening altered at once to familiar writing.

"You are acting like a silly boy. As things are, both in my cousins' clan and in that of my late husband, I cannot receive you at my house, and you ought to have sense enough to realize that without being told. Be patient and I shall arrange for an interview with you. Please avoid me at the Baths, as I have you.

"Farewell."

This letter greatly encouraged me and I felt so elated that I really enjoyed life for the next few days, which were filled up with a reception of my own each morning, a round of receptions to salute magnates, my salutation to the Emperor, a lunch always with some friends, a long nap at home, a lingering afternoon at the Baths of Titus, and a jolly dinner at some friend's house, for I was invited out twice each day.

On the seventh day before the Kalends of September, as I was on my way to the Palace levee, a runner inconspicuously clad ranged himself alongside my litter and handed me a letter.

It read:

"She whose handwriting he will recognize gives greeting to Hedulio. Take care! Do not let anyone see this letter; take care to seem negligent and uninterested as you read it.

"A conspiracy against the life of Caesar has been detected and reported. Its leader is said to be Egnatius Capito. As some informer, sponsored by Talponius Pulto, claims to have seen you in Capito's company, you are implicated. Save yourself. Do not return home. Do not go to the Palace, order yourself carried immediately to the Querquetulan Gate. On the way there purchase a raincloak and an umbrella hat and whatever else may be needful for your journey. Outside the Porta Querquetulana, in front of Plosurnia's tavern, you will find one of the fastest horses in Italy, a blood-bay, noticeable for light-blue reins with silver bosses, his saddlecloth light-blue with a silver edge. Descend from your litter in front of the tavern, accost the man holding the horse, say to him:

"'Is this the leopard-tamer's horse?'

"He will reply:

"'It is.'

"Then say:

"'I am the leopard-tamer.'

"He will then allow one of your spare bearers to take the horse.

"Divest yourself of your toga then, not sooner. Equip yourself for your journey. Mount and order your bearers to take your empty litter home. Follow the Praenestine Highroad

till it meets the Via Labicana. Then take the first crossroad to the Highroad to Tibur. From Tibur press on to Carseoli. Prom there return to Villa Andivia as you judge best. Provide for yourself thereafter as best you may.

"Farewell."

I recognized Vedia's handwriting. I trusted her implicitly. I was far more elated at her concern for me than I was depressed at my impending ruin. Somehow the fact that she had taken the trouble not only to warn me, but to think out for me all the details of a plan of at least temporary escape, the inference that she hoped, hoped against hope, that I might be somehow saved, heartened me amazingly; so that I was rather inspirited at the prospect of adventure than daunted by the shadow of inescapable doom. I gathered myself together, determined to take as much advantage as possible of Vedia's warning, and of the respite it afforded me. I resolved to follow her suggestions. I had set out for the Palace unusually early. I had plenty of time. I ordered my bearers to carry me through the heart of the City down the whole length of the Vicus Tuscus to the meat market.

I should, I suppose, have been in an agony of vain regrets; I rather expected from moment to moment to be drowned in an inundation of such sensations, I was more than a little surprised at my actual feelings. Here I was, hitherto a wealthy Roman nobleman in excellent standing with my fellows, my superiors and the Prince; from now on a hunted fugitive and not likely to postpone my last hour more than a few days. I was, presumably, viewing the throbbing heart of glorious Rome for the last time. I should have felt chief mourner at my own funeral. Actually I relished, I hugely enjoyed, every pace of my progress through the filling streets, where the passers-by and idlers were still fresh, and lively after a night's sleep and where everything was irradiated by cheerful morning sunlight. I felt cheerful as the sunlight.

Beyond the Meat Market I had my bearers stop at the Temple of Fortune, which I entered, there I prayed fervently before the statue of the Goddess.

When I was again out in the market I bought two live white hens, young and plump, and assigned one of my relief-bearers to carry carefully the basket in which the old market-woman ensconced them, after I had paid her well for her basket as well as her hens.

Then I had my men carry me down the straight empty street along the southwest flank of the Circus Maximus. Half way along it I halted them before the Temple of Mercury. This I entered and, bidding one of the attendants lead me to the priest in charge at that hour, I requested him to offer for me the two white hens and beseech for me the favor of the God.

Outside I reëntered my litter and made my bearers trot all the way round by the big and little Coelian Hills to the Querquetulan Gate. We passed on this route many cheap shops. From one I bought a pair of horseman's high boots, soft and supple and mud-proof. All the way I enjoyed hugely my outing and the sights and sounds around me. From another shop one of my reliefs brought me an umbrella hat which fitted me and a voluminous horseman's raincloak which could not but protect anybody; at another I had bought for me a wallet; at another flint and steel in a good horn case, compact and neat.

Outside the Querquetulan Gate, which my bearers reached blown and sweating, although the reliefs had changed at short intervals, we had no difficulty in locating Plosurnia's tavern. The holder of the bay horse with the blue and silver trappings recognized my pass-words and surrendered his charge to one of my extra bearers. At the tavern another lined my wallet with bread, sausages, olives, dried figs and cheese, while I was changing into horseman's kit.

I put into the wallet my money, more than enough cash for my journey home, and Vedia's letter. I then mounted, gave my boys their orders and set off at an easy canter. I knew I must show no signs of haste until I was on the Highroad, so I took my time about working round to it. Once on the Via Tiburtina, where horsemen at a tearing gallop, going in either direction, were too common a sight to cause any remarks, I let out my mettlesome mount and covered the remainder of the twenty-four miles to Tibur not long before noon.

Between the bridge over the Anio and Tibur are a number of hilltops, from each of which one has a fine view of Rome, if the weather is clear and bright. The weather was very bright and clear and the views very fine. At each hilltop I checked my mount, wheeled him and remained so for sometime, contemplating the magnificence I might never see again, the glory upon which my gaze, most likely, would never again feast. I should have felt my eyes fill with tears at each of these prospects, the viewing of which was, each time, in the nature of a last farewell. Yet, somehow, most irrationally, I felt anything but dejected, rather hopeful and full of conjectures about my future, instead of being filled with forebodings of doom, with sorrow for my hard fate.


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