

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO
VOL.II
BY
EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

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DISAPPEARANCE

CHAPTER X ESCAPE

At Tibur I put up at a clean little inn I had known of since boyhood, but which I had never before entered or even seen, so that I felt safe there and reasonably sure to pass as a traveller of no rank whatever. My knowledge of country ways, too, enabled me to behave like a landed proprietor of small means.

After a hearty lunch I pushed boldly on up the Valerian Highway and covered the twenty-two miles between Tibur and Carseoli without visibly tiring my mount. He was no more winded nor lathered than any traveller's horse should be at the end of a day on the road. At Carseoli I again knew of a clean, quiet inn, and there I dined and slept.

Thence I intended to follow the rough country roads along the Tolenus. Stream-side roads are always bad, so I allowed two days more in which to reach home, and I could hardly have done it quicker. The night after I left Carseoli I camped by a tributary of the Tolenus in a very pretty little grove. From Carseoli on the weather was fine.

About the third hour of the day, on the fifth day before the Kalends of September, of a fair, bright morning, I came to my own estate. On the road nearing it I had met no one. I met no one along the woodland tracks leading into my property from that side: on my estate I met no one save just as I was about to enter my villa. Then I encountered Ofatulus, bailiff of the Villa Farm. He, of course, was amazed to see me. I bade him mention to no one, not even to his wife, that I had returned home.

"Be secret!" I enjoined.

He nodded.

I believed he would be dumb. Give me a Sabine to keep a secret; I'd back any Sabine against any other sort of human being.

Ofatulus took my horse and swore that no one outside of the stable should know it was there or suspect it. I told him to lock the trappings in the third locker in my harness-room, which locker I knew should be empty.

I got from the stable to my villa without encountering any human being. Outside I found Agathemer, as I had hoped I would, sunning himself on the terrace.

He was even more amazed than Ofatulenius and began to exclaim. I silenced him and questioned him as to his health. He told me that his back was entirely healed and that, while any effort still caused him not a little pain, he was capable of the customary activities of his normal life.

I then told him why I had returned home. He listened in silence, except that he here and there put in a query when I omitted some detail in my excitement.

When he understood my situation thoroughly he asked:

"And what do you propose to do?"

"I propose," I said, "to live here unobtrusively, visiting no one, receiving no one and, by all the means in our power, arranging that as few persons as possible may know of my presence here. There is not the faintest scintilla of hope in my doing anything whatever. But if I merely exist without calling attention to my existence there may be some hope for me. No man accused as I am is ever allowed an opportunity to clear himself: but it has often happened that, by keeping away from Rome for a time, a man in my situation has given his friends a chance to use their influence in his behalf, to gain the ear of someone powerful at Court, to get an unbiassed hearing for what they had to say, to prove his complete innocence and rehabilitate him. Vedia and Tanno will do all they can for me. I have hosts of friends, not a few of whom will aid Vedia and Tanno as far as they are able. By keeping quiet here I shall give my friends a chance to save me, if I can be saved. If not, I shall here await such orders as may be sent me, or my arrest, if I am to be seized."

"Is that your whole plan?" Agathemer queried.

"All," I said.

"May I speak?" he asked. "May I speak out my full mind?"

"Certainly!" I agreed. "Speak!"

"If you stay here as you propose," he said, "you will be arrested not later than tomorrow and haled to your death, if not butchered at sight. At most the centurion in charge might allow you an hour in which to commit suicide. But if you remain here inactive your death is certain, you will never see two sunrises.

"But I agree with you that your friends will do what they can and I heartily believe that Opsitius and Vedia will move sky, earth and sea and Hades beneath all, as far as their powers go, to save you. If they have any chance of succeeding they will need more time than Perennis will give them. If you stay here you will be dead before they can so much as lay plans to gain them the ear of Saoterus and Anteros or some other Palace favorite, let alone groping through all the complicated intrigues necessary to arrange for an audience with the Emperor when he might be in a compliant humor.

"Your plan means certain death for you. I think I can save you if you will put yourself in my hands. Will you?"

"I most certainly will," I said, "and without reservation. If you think you can save me, tell me what you want me to do and I shall do it. I shall follow your suggestions implicitly."

"Well," said Agathemer, "since remaining here means certain death and since there seems a chance of final salvation for you through the efforts of your friends and especially those of Opsitius and Vedia, since they will need plenty of time to save you, if you can be saved, from every point of view the right course of action is not merely inaction, not merely hiding, but an immediate and complete disappearance. If you are found you will be ordered to kill yourself or will be put to death. If you cannot be found you cannot be killed or made to kill yourself. Since you cannot be found you will stay alive until you can be rehabilitated with the Emperor. If that cannot be done or is not done, at least you will be alive. My deduction is, disappear at once and completely. You have many times, for a lark, disguised yourself as an ordinary country proprietor or small farmer and mingled with the crowd at a fair without being recognized. What you have done for an evening in jest now attempt in earnest and for as long a period as is necessary. And to begin with, vanish from here at once and completely."

"But how?" I queried.

"If you are to disappear," said Agathemer, "why should I waste time in explaining how. Let us disappear together, leaving no trace and let us do it at once."

"But," I cried, "I could never consent to anything like that! You are not in any danger. You will be manumitted by my will and you can live safely, comfortably and at ease. Why should I drag you into I know not what miseries, hardships and privations along with me? Tell me what to do and I will proceed to do it. But do you stay here."

"If I told you my plan," said Agathemer, "you could not carry it out alone. My scheme for your escape and vanishment pivots on my disappearing along with you. If you agree, as I

beg that you will, we shall both be safe, I hope and trust; alive, able to return here if it can be arranged, able to live elsewhere, somehow, if it cannot be arranged. If you refuse your assent, I shall die with you or soon after you; I am resolute not to survive you."

"I agree," I said. "I am under your orders henceforth, not you under mine."

Agathemer at once guided me into the house and upstairs to his rooms, for he inhabited the guest-suite next my rooms, which had been my uncle's.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is for both of us to eat heartily, for we do not know when we shall eat again. I have been choicy and whimmy about my eating since I came back here and mostly my meals have revolted me and I have left the triclinium practically unfed, whereas I have often been seized with imperative hunger between meals. I have an overabundant supply of all sorts of tempting cold viands up here."

And, in fact, in the room he used as a reading and writing room, on a side table, I found an inviting array of cold meats, jellies, cakes, and fancy breads, with an assortment of wines. We ate till we could eat no more, masticating our food carefully and taking wine in moderation.

Then Agathemer put up a liberal supply of bread and relishes in a small linen bag, obliterated all traces of our meal and presence and went into his dressing-room, where he stripped stark naked and rubbed himself down with a rough towel, carefully disposing of his garments in his wardrobes.

From one of his tables he took a small silver case containing flint, steel and tinder. Then we went into my rooms, where he stripped me, rubbed me down, and disposed of my garments as he had of his. My wallet he took pains to hide in the bottom of a chest, after emptying it and putting the contents about so that each article was hidden in a different place and none could be connected with the others or with the wallet. The little horn case with flint and steel he retained.

The ante-room to what had been my uncle's bed-room and was now mine, had on its walls trophies of hunting-spears and other weapons of the chase. Agathemer selected two knives for killing wounded stags, dependable implements, blade and shank one piece of fine steel, the handles of stag-horn, fastened on with copper rivets.

With the bag of food, the two knives and the two tinder boxes we went up my uncle's private stair to his library and reading room.

My uncle had had his own ideas as to nearly everything, usually much at variance with other people's ideas. As to building his ideas, perhaps, were less aberrant than his opinions on other subjects, but, certainly he was as tenacious of them as of his other notions.

He held, in the first place, that sleeping-rooms on the ground-floor of any house were unhealthy and a relic of primitive barbarism. He was equally positive that, in the country, where there was ample room for a building to spread out, it was folly to construct a dwelling of three or more stories: such villas he railed at as exhibitions of silly extravagance and of a desire to appear different from one's neighbors. His villa, therefore, was of two stories only.

But, on the other hand, he loved fresh air, light, and wide prospects from his windows; also he spent most of his daylight reading or writing, or both. To gratify to the full all his chief tastes at once he included in the plans of his villa a sort of tower, at the northwest corner, rising well above the remainder of the structure, so that the floors of its third story were on a level higher than that of the ridge-poles of the roofs of the other parts of the villa and from the wide windows of its rooms there was an unobstructed view over the tiles of the villa upon the farm- buildings and beyond them across the fields to the woodlands and the forested eastern and southern horizon as well as a fine outlook down the valley northward and across it westward.

In this third story of this tower he housed his library and there he spent most of his time. It was reached by three stairs. One was connected with the villa in general and was used by him when going down to meals in his triclinium, or when escorting visitors up to his library, as he sometimes did with his particular favorites; and this stair was also used by such servants as he might summon to him while in his library or as might have to go up there to attend to it in his absence. The second stair connected with his living-rooms on the second floor, which rooms looked northwestward, as he detested being waked early by the rays of the rising sun and loved basking in the mellow radiance of afternoon sunlight. The third stair is not easy to describe and was one of my uncle's oddest eccentricities. It was inside a sort of minor tower built against the tower in which his library was set aloft, which minor tower extended far up towards the sky, like a great chimney. What was the primary purpose of this minor tower I shall explain later. In it, however, was a narrow, cramped, spiral stair, unlit by any window or loop-hole, unconnected with the second or first floor of the villa, opening at the top into the library and at the bottom into a cellar, a cellar so far down the hillside that its vault was below the level of the floors of the cellars under the villa in general. This stair my uncle had had constructed to enable him to apply his idea that a master could ensure the diligence of his tenants and slaves only if he was known to be in the habit of coming upon them unexpectedly at any hour of the day, only if they never knew when he might appear and

so were spurred to continual diligence for fear he might catch them idling. For my uncle, though he habitually spent his entire daylight in his library, might at any hour slip down this stair, slip out onto the northwestern slope from the villa through a door locked to all but him and of which he kept the key, or might slip out southeastward or southwestward or northeastward, through similar doors on the ground floor, reached by passages built between the many cellars of the upper level of cellars under the ground floor of the villa. By this plan and by popping out sometimes many times a day, sometimes after an interval of many days, he kept his underlings alert.

My uncle's tastes in respect to books were as peculiar as in all other respects. He had a really magnificent library, including all the Greek poets, all our own, and other noble works of literature, such as the historians in both the Greek and Latin tongues; the orators, and the writers on painting, sculpture, architecture and music.

But he paid more attention to his personal fads. He had a creditable collection of all works on divination, a similarly inclusive assemblage of works on the theory of government, and an almost complete array of the writings of the Emperors, from the Divine Julius to the Divine Aurelius, whose meditations he extolled.

But he extolled above all other Princes and authors the Divine Julius.

"Caius Julius Caesar," he was never tired of saying, "was, in all respects, the greatest man who ever lived on earth. He was also the greatest author earth has ever produced. His poems, his mimes, his comedies, his dramas, compare favorably with the best of their kind. His accounts of his wars, whether against the Gauls or against his domestic adversaries, are models of narration, of lucidity, of terseness and of style. His astronomy is the best manual of that subject in Latin. His works on Engineering surpass anything of their kind in clearness and preserve for the benefit of future generations more useful and original ideas than ever before came from the brain of any one man. His works on divination, particularly that on Auspices, excel everything previously written on that most important of all human arts.

"But his two books against Cato are his masterpiece. It is wonderful that any man could have, in the space of eight days, written, with his own hand, so fiery an invective, so compelling of the attention of any reader, so completely annihilative of his antagonist's pretensions and contentions, so convincingly establishing his own: to have made of it, in the course of composition so rapid and totally unrevised, such a jewel of Latinity, in a style not only pure and impeccable, but glowing and charming, is astonishing. But it is downright miraculous that he should have embodied in it the whole theory of government with all its principles marshalled in their array with the most perfect subordination of considerations of lesser importance to main principles. The two

Anticatones contain all that a ruler or any minister of a ruler need know to guide him aright in his tasks. The First Book displays a complete theory of internal policy, the Second of external policy. The two together form a whole which is the most brilliant product of Rome's literary and political genius."

In accordance with his high esteem for Caesar's masterpiece he had possessed himself of a beautiful copy of it, written by the celebrated calligrapher Praxitelides, upon papyrus of the finest quality. It was in seven rolls, each book of Caesar's text occupying two rolls, the index a fifth, and the commentaries of grammarians two more. The rollers inside the rolls were of Nubian ivory, their ends carved into pine cones, each of the fourteen representing the cone of a different variety of pine. Each roll was enclosed in a copper cylinder made accurately to be both watertight and airtight. The seven cylinders were housed in an ebony case, inlaid with mother of pearl. I have never seen any literary work more beautifully enshrined.

When Agathemer and I were in the library he shut and locked the door at the top of my uncle's private stair, as he had the door at the bottom of it. The two keys he hid far apart, where neither was at all likely to be found easily or soon. He had laid the knives, tinder-boxes and bag of food on a table. He went to the case containing my uncle's most highly prized treasures. From it he took the ebony box, opened it and took out two of the cylinders. From these he removed the rolls embodying the grammarians' comments. These rolls he put back in the box, shut it, returned it to the case and closed the case.

The two cylinders he had laid on the table by the things which he had brought up stairs. Inside each cylinder he placed a knife, a tinder-box, and a selection of the food. The bag, with what remained of the food, he tied up again. He handed me one cylinder.

"Now," he said, "we are prepared to escape. My idea is to leave no trace of how we leave this villa, to have no one see us leave, to have nothing with us which could identify us after we have left. We are to go down the secret stair, crawl out through the big lower drain pipe, hide in the bushes till dark, take to the woods, hide by day, creep northward by night, and, if we succeed in reaching a district where no one would recognize us, press on northward boldly, passing ourselves off as runaway slaves if anyone encounters us."

"We'd be locked up as runaway slaves," I said, "advertised, sold to the highest bidder if unclaimed and henceforth kept in slavery."

"I'm in slavery now," said Agathemer. "You, if kept in slavery, would at least be alive and in no danger of being recognized."

"Let us go," said I.

We looked at each other and burst out laughing. We made a sufficiently absurd spectacle, each stark naked, each holding a copper cylinder, as we stood in that elegant and luxurious room. According to the fashion of the time, which aped the ways of the young Emperor, we wore our hair moderately long and as both had hair naturally curly, were perfectly in style as to hair. Our beards, also, we wore clipped but not shaved, and long enough to show a tendency to curl, as the Emperor wore his.

Our laugh over I gave a farewell glance about my little-used library. It was then about the fifth hour. Agathemer gazing rather outside at the landscape than inside at the room remained frozen stiff, staring northward down the valley.

"We are barely in time," he said. "Mercury is with us and Fortune."

"Before I left Rome," I said, "I prayed to Fortune and sacrificed to Mercury."

"Time well spent," he said. "Look there!"

Peering where he pointed I saw, where the road was first visible in the distance, fully two miles away, a dozen or more horsemen, manifestly, even at that distance, of military bearing: I caught, against the sunrays, a gleam of crimson and a glint of gold; I conjectured a detail of Praetorian Guards coming to arrest me or to put me out of the way.

Agathemer opened the upper door of the secret stair, which unlike most doors, could be locked on either side, for my uncle always wanted to lock the doors he used, whichever way he passed through them. After we had passed this door Agathemer closed it behind us, and, as we stood in the pitch dark, locked it.

We groped our way down the dizzying turns of the steep stair, Agathemer going first and, at the bottom, whacking his knee-cap on the lower door. This he unlocked and I found myself in a dim-lit cellar which I had visited but twice before. Agathemer locked the stair-door behind us.

Now the minor tower, in which was the spiral stair, was built as a vent to carry up into the air, far above the roofs of the villa, any miasma, effluvium or exhalation from the drainage-water of the villa's baths, kitchen and latrines. On the subject of harmful vapours from drains my uncle was fanatical and to bear out his contentions he quoted from the works of many celebrated philosophers and physicians, including those of Galen.

Pursuant with his notions as to how to get rid of the exhalations from drainage and to make certain that no whiff of any such vapours ever found its way up any offset into his kitchen or any latrine or bathroom, he had built in this small high tower a shaft reaching its top and full six feet square all the way up. At its bottom it widened out into a chamber fully twelve feet square, carried down below the level of the cellar floor to form a cemented tank, vat, cistern or cesspool fully as deep as it was wide. The outfall from this trap was by a terra-cotta pipe of considerable size, its opening at such a point that the drain-water in the trap never reached higher than a foot or so below the level of the cellar floor. The various drainage-pipes from different parts of the villa were so led into this trap-room that their lower ends were always under water, so that no exhalations could ever pass up any of them.

To the bottom of the trap settled the solid matter and sediment from the drainage-water. The trap was cleaned by slaves so often that the ooze in it never rose high enough to escape down the outfall pipe and befoul the Bran Brook. For cleaning out the trap-room had an outer door, of heavy, solid oak, carefully locked, which when opened enabled the slaves entrusted with this task to dredge or bale or scoop out the filth and convey it off to be used as garden manure. There was also an inner door, as heavy and solid as the other, opening from the cellar, which enabled my uncle to inspect the trap at his convenience. This door Agathemer opened.

I peered in and, after my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, descried the opening of the outfall drain opposite me. It was large enough for lean men like me and Agathemer to crawl through, but certainly barely large enough. I could see, after some moments, the lower ends of the drain pipes, two dozen or more, dipping into the foul liquid which filled the cistern. It was very foul, for since my uncle's death the cleaning out of the trap had been neglected and the ooze came almost to the top of the water.

Agathemer hunted about the cellar, found some bits of stone about the size of apples, put them in the bag of food, tied up its neck again, and threw it into the trap, where it sank out of sight. After it he threw in the two keys.

Now was the moment for our plunge into the unknown. Agathemer's plan implied that we must crawl a full furlong through the outfall drain. We might be drowned, at any point of the crawl, by a rush of water from the bath-tank. We might suffocate in the foul vapours of the drain. But, plainly, Agathemer had pitched upon our only chance of escape, and we must escape that way and at once or not at all.

Agathemer threw the two copper cylinders, one after the other, neatly and deftly into the mouth of the outfall drain.

"Now," he said, "one of us must jump for that opening, and must cling to it, his arms inside, his body in the ooze of the trap. The other must stand on the narrow stone ledge inside this door, must contrive to slam the door behind him so that it will shut fast and stay shut, must then, in the pitch dark, jump for the shoulders of the other. If the drag of his weight pulls the other down, both of us will drown in this deep trap in the vile ooze. If the under man clings on, the upper must crawl over him into the drain, pass back to him one of the cylinders and then we shall be ready for our crawl down. Which goes first?"

"You choose," said I.

"Can you slam the door?" Agathemer queried.

I considered the door, the sill, the ledge inside, the jambs of the door, its edges; stood on the ledge, went through the motions and concluded that I could slam the door shut and not be knocked off into the ooze by its impact or topple off because of the sill's narrowness. I said so.

"Then I'll go first," said Agathemer. "You are, even yet, far more impaired in strength by your beating than I by my flogging. If I came second you might not be able to hold on to the opening of the drain. I know I can hold on, no matter how much filth is plastered over my head as you crawl over me. I should not like the idea of defiling your head with filth in crawling over you. Jump so that your clutching hands just reach my shoulders; so that your weight will come on me gradually as you sink into the ooze. Take your time about crawling over me. Be sure to pass back to me one cylinder."

Then he drilled me as to the signals he would give me by pinching my feet. When he was sure we both knew them he grinned a wry grin, and made a whimsical boyish gesture with his uplifted right hand, took a careful stand on the sill, balanced himself and jumped.

"I'm all right," he called back, "and ready for you."

Three times I tried to slam that door and failed to shut it. The fourth time I found myself, my back against the shut door, my toes sticking out over the edge of the stone sill, balanced in the pitch dark on a too narrow ledge.

"Lean back against the door," Agathemer called, thickly. "If it gives it is not shut."

It did not give.

I said so.

"Then no one will ever know how we got out," said Agathemer; adding: "Jump when you are ready, but say 'now.'"

I jumped and my fingers caught his shoulders. He held on. My body sank slowly through the ooze, which gave way with a sickening sliminess, until I was in contact with Agathemer all the way to my toes. Then I began to try to crawl up over him. I found it far harder than either of us had anticipated.

All slippery as we were with the foul ooze it was a fearful struggle for me to scramble up over him, I slipped back so often. After what seemed an hour of effort and apprehension I had my head, shoulders and most of my body in the drain and knew I had succeeded. I wriggled forward till I felt my feet beyond the opening, then about as far ahead, pushing before me the cylinders. When Agathemer touched my foot I pushed a cylinder past my body and felt, with my ankle, that he pulled it back.

After that, escape was a matter of wriggling on down the drain. And wriggling was not impossible, though excessively difficult and exhausting. The drain was nowhere choked with silt, but all along was furred with ooze and there was more than an inch of ooze along its bottom. In this, hitching myself forward on my elbows by violent contortions, I slipped back almost as much as I heaved forward.

Agathemer seemed to have as much trouble as I had and to find the effort as exhausting. For he had instructed me that I was not to crawl forward until he pinched my foot. One pinch was to mean "advance," two pinches "rest." More than once he had signalled me to rest.

Our worst moment came somewhere near half way down the sewer. There I encountered a cracked drain-pipe, the ragged edge of the broken terra- cotta projecting into the sewer, its point toward me. I wriggled my shoulders by it, though it gouged my shoulder-muscle on that side; but, at my hips, it stuck into me so that I could not get past it.

Agathemer, behind, kept pinching my foot, signalling for me to go forward. I bellowed explanations, but could not suppose that he could hear them in that horrible tube. But he either heard or guessed, he never could be sure which. Anyhow, he felt that we must get forward or perish. In desperation he sunk his teeth into the soft part of the inner side of the sole of my left foot. The pain made me give a convulsive wriggle and I scraped past the obstacle, tearing my hip badly in getting clear.

From there on we wriggled frantically till I could see ahead a round patch of light at the lower outfall of the drain.

It seemed an age before I reached the opening, but reach it I did. I lay there, my head just inside, panting and guzzling clean air in great gulping gasps. Agathemer pinched my foot. I slipped out into the oozy pool below the outfall, slid out as quietly as I could and kept myself submerged up to my chin, clutching my cylinder with one hand, pulling myself clear of the drain and keeping my head out of the drainage by holding to the stem of an alder bush growing by the brook's edge.

I came to rest, the sunlight dazzling my eyes, though the outfall was shaded by willows above the alders, and looked for Agathemer. He, his face purple, kept his head inside the sewer and I could see him suck in the clean air in long gasps as I had.

At that instant there was a squawking above us and, through the alders, came, quacking and flapping their wings, a hundred or more of my uncle's valued white ducks. Their alarm made me peep through the alder stems. I saw, not ten yards from my face, the legs of horses, heard their hoofs thud on the roadway, descried men's feet against their bellies, recognized the gilded edges of the boot-soles, the make of the boots, the gilt scales on the kilt-straps, the gilded breast plates, the crimson tunics and short-cloaks, the gilded sword-sheaths and helmets. There, just above us, was passing the detachment of Praetorian Guards sent to arrest or despatch me.

They clanked by us, never suspecting our proximity, though the ducks resented our presence in their favorite pool and quacked at us protestingly. They continued, in fact, to quack at us most of the time until sunset, so that both of us were in an agony of dread for fear that some passer-by might notice their voluble expressions of displeasure and might take a notion to investigate to discover what was exciting their wrath.

But no one was attracted by the ducks' noise and, if anyone passed up or down the road we, where we were, did not know it.

We talked, at intervals, in whispers. Agathemer said that he had been barely grazed by the broken drain-pipe and hardly noticed his scratches. I, on the other hand, was in great pain from the gouge along my hip, and hardly less pained by the tear in my shoulder. The water, under which I had to keep up to my chin, dulled the pain of my wounds, but chilled me till my teeth chattered, though the weather was hot; so hot in fact, that the sunrays on my head seemed to scorch my hair, even through the willows and alders. I was devoutly glad when the sunrays became more slanting and the daylight began to wane, and the ducks, still quacking protestingly, departed.

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CHAPTER XI HIDING

It was fully dark before we dared to leave our hiding-place and attempt the risky venture of essaying to reach a safer shelter or refuge in the forests without attracting the attention of any dog at any of the several farmsteads which we must pass.

Agathemer led and I followed, my teeth chattering and the night insects biting me severely. Hugging our precious copper cylinders we waded more than waistdeep in the water, up the Bran Brook, sometimes all but swimming, as we skirted some of the deeper pools. There was no moon and we could see but little by the faint starlight. We had to go slowly, as we could not swim and keep hold of our cylinders; and must not risk losing one if Agathemer went over his head in a deep pool. It seemed to me that we had been threading the curves of the brook for at least two hours when I began to feel as if something were wrong. Even in the dark I had been aware of a sort of recognition of each pool, shallow, riffle, bend, bank or what not. Now, gradually, it came over me that I was among surroundings as unfamiliar as if I had not been in Sabinum, or even in Italy.

I caught Agathemer by the arm.

"Where are we?" I whispered.

"Don't talk!" he warned.

But I insisted; for, as we were by now no more than knee-deep in the water, I knew we must be well up towards the headwaters and it came over me that we had not turned off anywhere as sharply as we should had we turned up either the Chaff or the Flour.

"Are we going up the Bran?" I queried.

"Precisely!" Agathemer breathed.

I almost spoke out loud.

"This," I said, "is the last place on earth I'd expect you to guide me to."

"Precisely," he repeated, "and it's the last place on earth anybody else would expect me to lead you to or you to be in, by any chance; therefore it's the last place in Italy where

any one will look for you; therefore it is, just now, the safest place in Italy for you. Come on, I know every stone of this brook."

I followed him. His logic was good, but, on Ducconius Furfur's land I felt hopelessly lost and overwhelmed by despair.

We had not gone far from where I had forced Agathemer to reveal his ruse, when he turned round and whispered:

"This is the place. Here we leave the water. Follow me."

I was dimly aware of a blacker blackness before us, as of a big, tall rock. This we skirted and then stepped out of the brook towards the left. There we stepped into deep drifts of dead leaves.

"Here is bedding," said Agathemer, "such as Ulysses was content with after his long sea-swim to the island of the Phaeacians. Perhaps we can get along in such bedding."

Naked as we were we burrowed into the dead leaves, and, after a bit I felt less chilly, though by no means warm.

Agathemer took from me the cylinder I had been carrying; opened one of the two, a matter of some difficulty, as the top was so tight; sniffed at it, and took from it some morsels of food: a bit of cold ham, a bit of cold fowl and a bit of bread. These I ate, chewing them slowly. At the same time he ate, as slowly, an equal share.

After eating we tried to sleep. I was too weary and drowsy to keep awake, and too cold and too much in pain from the scratch on my shoulder and the gouge on my hip to be able to sleep long. I got some sleep before dawn, but not much.

Fortunately for us the night had been clear, warm and windless. Even so we suffered severely with the cold; since the chilled air, of course, rolled down the hillsides into the hollow along the bed of the brook, till the valley was filled with thick mist and every leaf and twig dripped with moisture. Through the mist the dawn broke pearly gray at first and then iridescent; and, when the first sunrays penetrated the white haze and gilded every leaf-edge, turning the tree-tops to gold and making every waterdrop a diamond, no lovelier morning could be imagined.

The trees about and above us were mostly beeches, with many chestnuts and a few plane-trees and poplars. We were in a clump of willows with thick alders under them, so that, even with no other protection, we could not have been seen from any distance. And

we were most excellently protected, being on a little island where the brook forked and flowed, three or four yards wide and nearly a yard deep, round a huge gray rock, fully fifteen yards across and nearly seven yards high, a bulge of worn stone, shaped much like half a melon and almost as symmetrical. And, as one might lay half a melon, curve up, and then split it with one blow of a kitchen- knife, so this great rock, as if cleft by a single sweep of a Titan's sword, was rent in half and the halves left about four yards apart. The fracture was clean and smooth, except that a piece about two yards square had cracked loose at the ground level from the southern half and lay bedded in the mud, its top a foot or so above the earth, leaving in the face of one rock a rectangular niche about a man's length each way, in which cavity two men could shelter from the rain.

As soon as it was light enough to see I was for crawling into this little cavern. But Agathemer restrained me.

"The face of the rock," he said, "would feel cold as ice to your skin. You have, even if you do not realize it, somewhat warmed the leaves next you. For the present we are least uncomfortable where we are. The dawn-wind cannot get at our hides while we are under these leaves. Keep still."

He kept himself as much as possible under the leaves but wriggled nearer the altar-shaped bit of rock. Half-sitting, half crouching by it, little besides his head out of the heap of leaves in which he was, he opened both cylinders and laid out on the top of the stone what food was in them. This he divided into six equal portions, two he put back in each cylinder. We munched interminably, making every morsel last as long as possible.

The food revived me, and even before the dawn-wind had died, the rays of the sun began to make themselves felt. I began to be restless; Agathemer again checked me.

"Keep still," he commanded. "As soon as the sun has dried the dew off the leaves I can make you more comfortable. Just now we are best as we are."

I kept under the leaves, but I peered about. At each end of the cleft between the two halves of the rock I could see the brook brawling by among the worn stones. The line of the cleft was directly across the bed of the brook; and, along the cleft, past the detached, almost buried, altar- shaped stone, I descried, barely discernible but unmistakable, such a path as is made by the bare or sandalled feet of even one human being following daily the same track. I conned it. I judged that it was many, many decades old and had been trodden daily for a lifetime or so, but that it had been totally disused for at least a year and possibly for more.

I pointed it out to Agathemer and asked him about it.

"That," he said, "is part of what used to be the shorter and more used of the two paths from Furfur's villa to Philargyrus's farmstead. Naturally, since the Philargyrus farm has been detached from Furfur's estate and has become part of yours, there must be very little intercommunication between the farm and the villa and I judged that any slave going from one to the other would avoid the more obvious path and sneak round the longer way. Therefore I judged it safer to locate here, as this path is probably totally unused."

"How did you know of it?" I queried.

Up to his neck in leaves, arms under too, only his head out, Agathemer blushed all over his handsome face.

"Before Andivius won the suit," he said, "while Philargyrus was still Furfur's tenant, I had an impassioned love-affair with one of Furfur's slave-girls. We used to meet here, at first on moonlit nights, and, later, when we each knew every inch of our way here and home again, more often on moonless nights. I always waded up and down the bed of the brook, so as to leave no scent for any dog to follow. I know this nook well and thought of it the instant I began to plan an escape for you."

I said nothing.

"It is barely possible," he said, "that some one may use this path, even if no one has passed along it for months. That is just the way luck turns out. I mean to be invisible if anyone does come. There was no likelihood of anyone coming by at dawn, and no possibility of doing anything if anyone did come. Now it is warm enough for me to pick off the outer layer of dew-wet leaves from whatever heaps of dead leaves are hereabouts. I can gather the dry leaves into that little grotto. We can lie on a bed of them, wrapped up in them we can cower under them, we can even pull our heads under and be invisible if we hear footsteps approaching. You keep still."

He then stood up and went off. After a time he returned with a great armful of leaves, which he threw into the niche. After many trips he had the niche almost full of fairly dry dead leaves. By this time the warmth of the sun was making itself felt and I stood up and stretched myself. I did not feel weak, but my shoulder and hip, where the drain-pipe had torn me, and the sole of my foot, where Agathemer had bitten me, were decidedly painful. Agathemer, solicitously, steadied me on my feet and led me to the streamside. There I seated myself on a convenient rock and he bathed my foot, hip and shoulder. There was no sign of puffiness or heat in any of the three wounds, but all three were raw

and sore. We had nothing with which to dress them and Agathemer merely dried them as well as he could by patting them.

Meanwhile, even in my misery and despair, even hungry, weak and cold and in pain as I was, I could not but feel a gleam of pleasure at the enchanting beauty of the woodland scene about our hiding place. I gazed up at the bits of blue sky between the sunlit boughs, at the canopy of green, at the tenderer green of the underwood, at the carpet of grass, ferns, sedges and flowering plants which hid the earth and I almost rejoiced at its loveliness.

Agathemer led me back to our retreat and ensconced me in the nook of rock, on a soft deep bed of dry dead leaves, under a coverlet of more. Into the heaps he burrowed. The warmth of his naked body warmed me a trifle. There we lay still till dark. I slept, I think, from about noon till after sunset.

While we could still see, Agathemer, making me keep flat as I was, wriggled out of the leaves and pushed them aside from my head and face. We then ate half our remaining food. As it grew dark Agathemer expounded to me his plans.

"Last night," he said, "there was no sense in doing anything. Hiding and keeping out of sight was the best thing we could do. But tonight I must try to steal what we need most. The risk must be taken. If I do not return you will know I have done my best. But I feel confident of returning before midnight. I know every farmstead on Furfur's estate and all the dogs know me. On your estate I not only know the dogs, but I have just finished an inspection and I know the location of every dairy, smoke-house, larder and oven, I might almost say of every loaf, cheese, ham, flitch, wine-vat and oil-jar on the estate, not to mention every store-room where I might get us hats, tunics, sandals, quilts and what not.

"If I cannot do it otherwise, as a last resort I'll wake Uteria and tell her of our situation; she will help and will be secret. But I'll not resort to her if I can help it. Her most willing secrecy will not be as safe as her ignorance of our fate. No torture could surmount that."

I wanted to say "Farewell," but restrained myself and uttered a not too gloomy:

"Good luck and a prosperous return!"

After that, I lay and quaked till long past midnight. Then, I seemed to hear sounds which I could but interpret as heralding Agathemer's approach. In fact he soon spoke to me from close by and I heard the unmistakable blurred noise made by a soft and yet heavy pack deposited on the ground by my bed of leaves.

"I've nearly everything I wanted," said Agathemer. "Keep still while I untie the quilt I carried it all in, and find things in the dark."

Presently he said:

"Stand up, and I'll try to dress you."

In the dark his hand found my hand and he guided me so that I extricated myself from the heap of leaves without hitting my head on the jutting roof of rock and without slipping on the wet earth or stumbling from weakness.

In the dark he slipped over my head a coarse, patched tunic. (I could feel against my skin the rude stitching of the patches.) Then he wrapped about me a coarse cloak, also much patched.

"Now," he said, "stand where you are till I make some sort of a bed for you."

He fumbled about in the dark, grunting and making, I thought, too much rustling in the leaves. Presently he said:

"I've laid a doubled quilt on the leaves and packed them down. Give me your hand and I'll arrange you on it. Then I'll cover you with another quilt."

He did, deftly and solicitously.

I began to feel warm for the first time since I had sunk into the ooze of the drain-trap.

Agathemer fumbled about in the dark for a while and then came near again and felt me, making sure where my head was. He made me sit up.

"Smell that!" he said, "and catch hold of it."

I smelt ewe's-milk cheese and my fingers closed on a generous piece of it. Then, he put into my other hand a big chunk of bread, not yet entirely cold.

I bit the bread. It was Ofatulena's unsurpassable farm bread, half wheat flour and half barley flour and at that more appetizing and flavorsome than any wheat-bread I ever tasted.

"There is plenty for both of us," Agathemer said, "eat all you want, but eat slow and be careful not to bolt a morsel."

He sat down by me and we munched in silence.

By and by he asked:

"Do you want any more?"

"No," I answered, "you judged my capacity pretty well. I am filled up."

"Don't lie down," he said, "I have a small kid-skin of wine."

We laughed a good deal before he made sure precisely where my mouth was and put into it the reed which projected from one leg of the kid-skin. I drank in abundance of a thin, sour wine, such as we kept for the slaves. It gave me new life.

After that draught of wine I composed myself to sleep and went to sleep at once. I knew nothing of Agathemer's doings after that and did not feel him when he lay down by me. I slept till broad daylight.

When I waked Agathemer gave me a moderate draught of wine and all the bread and cheese I chose to eat: also a handful of olives. Then he displayed the total of his plunder: hats, with brims neither too broad nor too narrow, the best pattern if one was to have only one hat, worn and battered enough to suit us as being inconspicuous, yet nowhere torn, broken or slit; a tunic and cloak apiece, about the oldest and most patched in my villa-farm storage-loft, such as Ofatulena would hand out to newly bought and untried slaves; three quilts, as bad as the cloaks and tunics, yet, like them, fairly serviceable and far from worn out; the kid-skin of wine, a whole loaf of bread and the remains of the one we had been eating, what was left of a cheese and another whole; a little, tall, narrow jar of olive oil; a small bag of olives; a tiny box full of salt, the box of beechwood and about the size of a man's three fingers; a whetstone, a pair of rusty scissors; two small beechwood cups; a little copper dipper; some rags, old and worn, but perfectly clean; and a flageolet!

"In the name of Dionysius!" I cried laughing, "why the flageolet?"

Agathemer laughed also.

"My hand," he said, "came on it in the dark while feeling for the scissors. I could not resist bringing it. It is small, it weighs little, it will not add to our burdens and, once far away from here, I can play on it when we are lonely and so cheer us up."

"You appear," I said, "to have been able to help yourself as you pleased."

"No more trouble," said he, "than if I had walked out of the villa night before last and poked about the out-buildings to see whether everything was as when I inspected them by day; only three dogs barked, and they quieted down almost immediately. I am sure I roused no one and am ready to wager that every slave was as sound asleep as if I had not been there."

I lazily readjusted myself on my quilt and leaf mattress, tucking my quilt close about me. The morning was still, warm and cloudy, not a ray of sunshine visible, even for a moment, since sunset the night before.

"Time to dress your wounds!" said Agathemer.

He brought from the brook a cupful of water, and, with the smallest of the rags, solicitously bathed the gouge on my hip. He pronounced it healing healthily. He then anointed it with olive oil. The bathing and anointing comforted me greatly. Then, he similarly treated my shoulder and foot. When I was composed and covered he said:

"Now for the scissors!" and he sharpened them on his whetstone until he felt satisfied that he could get them no sharper, then he clipped my hair and beard, as closely as those scissors could. Then I sat up and clipped him, awkwardly and unevenly, but effectively.

Hardly were we shorn when drops of rain began to patter on the leaves above us. Agathemer wrapped his bread in the rags, put it between the two hats and tucked it under the leaves in one inner corner of the little grotto; bestowed the other things on it, or by it or in the other corner; and then lay down by me and pulled his quilt over him, then managing to cover both of us with leaves so that no trace of our presence would be visible to any passer-by, yet we could breathe comfortably behind or under our screen of leaves.

It rained all day, a sluggish drizzle, soaking the earth, but not accumulating enough water on it to produce visible trickles flowing on the surface. The air was perfectly windless, so that no rain blew in on us as we lay; we were damp, but not wet.

Before dusk the rain ceased and a brisk, warm wind shook the drops from the trees. We ate and Agathemer declared his intention of going on another raid about an hour after dark.

"What are you after this time?" I queried.

"More food," he said, "all I dare steal. I must not steal too much from any one place. I'll wager my pilferings of last night will pass, not merely unheeded, but entirely unnoticed. Ofatulena herself is so scatter-brained that she will never be sure that two loaves vanished from her oven; I doubt if she will so much as suspect any loss. But I cannot repeat that depletion of her baking tonight; she might talk. She is not quick-witted enough to conjecture the truth, if she did her utter loyalty would keep her mute; she'd impute the theft to some slave and likely as not have an investigation and advertise her loss. If there happened to be a crafty inspector with the Praetorians and if they have lingered, they might suspect the truth, beat the woods for us and capture us. So I must take a little here and a little there.

"Then I want another quilt for myself, and shoes for both of us. Is there anything else you can think of?"

"Manifestly!" I said, "we need a slave-scourge, a branding-iron with the long F for 'runaway', [Footnote: Fugitivus. The short F stood for fur, "thief."] a brazier big enough to heat the branding iron and enough charcoal to fire it once."

"What, in the name of Mercury," he whispered amazedly, "do you want of a branding-iron and a scourge?"

"We are to pass as runaway slaves, if caught, according to your outline of a plan," I said, "we had best do all we can to be sure of being thought ordinary runaway slaves. Few slaves travel far from their owners' land when they first venture to run away. We should be branded, to seem old offenders.

"As for you, thanks to Nemestronia, your back is all it should be to help play the part we intend. My back has no scars. You must scourge me till I have as many as you."

In the late dusk, inside that grotto, under the dead leaves, I could see the horror on his face.

"I scourge you!" he cried aloud.

"Hush!" I admonished him. "Scourged I must be, if I am to hope to escape Caesar's agents as you have cleverly conceived that I might. Steal a scourge and a branding-iron tonight, and let us be ready for the road as soon as may be; we cannot set out northwards till my back is healed and the brands on both of us, too."

We wrangled and argued till it was past time for him to start on his expedition. I finally declared that, unless he fetched a scourge and a branding-iron, I would, at daybreak, walk back to my villa and give myself up to the authorities. At that he consented.

I went to sleep soon after he was gone and never woke till daylight.

I woke from a troubled sleep, haunted by nightmare dreams, woke aware of a general discomfort, misery and horror, and of acute pain in my wounds. I seemed to have a good appetite and ate with relish; but, hardly had I ceased eating, when I appeared definitely feverish and the pain in my foot became unbearable.

I told Agathemer how I felt and he examined my wounds. All three were puffy, red, even purplish, and with pus at the edges. It was then and has always been since a puzzle to both of us why wounds, seemingly healing naturally when unwashed and undressed, should inflame and fester after careful washing and dressing.

My fever was not high, but enough to make me fretful and irritable. The day was very hot and still. I made Agathemer show me what spoil he had brought and at once ordered him to light the charcoal brazier, heat the iron and brand me. He demurred.

"If you feel feverish," he said, "the pain of the branding will double your fever and, if you have three inflamed wounds, the brand will fester to a certainty. You'll probably die of it, if I brand you."

"As well die one way as another," I said. "If we stay here we are certain to be discovered sooner or later. Our only hope is to get away as soon as may be. That cannot be until my back and both brands heal enough for us to tramp northward. Your back is healed, so your brand will heal promptly. I have to get over these wounds and the branding and scourging too. We must be quick."

He argued, but I was half delirious and wholly unreasonable. I again threatened to go straight to the villa and give myself up unless I had my way.

Agathemer, distraught and aghast, yielded. I argued that in the early haze, the little trifle of smoke from the charcoal could not attract notice. He complied. He had trouble getting a light from his flint and steel, but he succeeded, and, when the charcoal caught,

set the little brazier close to our nook and fanned it with a leafy bough to disperse the smoke. When no further trace of smoke appeared and the charcoal glowed evenly, he put the iron to heat.

When it was hot enough he suggested, again, that we put off branding me till next day, and that he brand only himself. I insisted on his branding me and branding me first.

To my amazement, when he had bared my shoulder, set me in position, and snatched the iron from the brazier, I shrank back with a sort of weak scream.

Agathemer instantly replaced the iron in the brazier and turned, staring at me in silence.

Instantly I had a revulsion of resolution, of obstinacy, of delirious rage. I reviled him. I commanded, I threatened.

Coolly he bared his left shoulder, knelt by the brazier and made as if to brand himself.

"You can't do it," I protested, "you'll scar yourself to no purpose and anyone will know the mark is not a brand. Fetch the iron here and hand it to me."

He did, deftly. Without a wince or squeak he, kneeling and leaning, held his shoulder to the white-hot iron. I could not have done better if I had been well and standing, instead of delirious and sitting, wrapped in a quilt, in a bed of dried leaves. I set the iron fair on the muscle of his shoulder, held it there just the brief instant required for branding without injury and snatched it away without any drag sideways.

After witnessing the stoical heroism of my slave I could not but insist on his branding me and was exalted to the point of nerve-tension at which I bit in my half-uttered scream as the heat seared my flesh. Agathemer dressed each brand with an oil-soaked rag and we composed ourselves to hide until dark.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XII SUCCOUR

As on the days before, no one passed us and, indeed, as far as I could judge, no living thing came near us, except a hare or two. We kept close under our heap of leaves, inside our niche of rock. But this time I did not snuggle inside my cloak and quilt; I cast off, first the quilt, then the cloak, and lay in my tunic only, panting and gasping. For it was a very hot, still day, and my fever increased, increased so much, in fact, that I could stomach but little food at dusk and took but little interest in anything; in my condition, in Agathemer's brand, in his departure.

His return, late at night, was to me only one incident of a sort of continuous nightmare: I was half asleep, wholly delirious and every impression was as the half-delusion of a half-waking dream. I was barely half-conscious, yet I had sense enough to lie still, except for writhing and turning over, and to restrain myself from singing or screaming.

At dawn I ate even less than at dusk, but I did eat something. Eating roused me enough for me to insist on Agathemer's stripping me and scourging me. He felt my forehead, my wrists and my feet, and shook his head.

"You have a terrific fever," he said, "and four festering wounds, for the brand-mark is festering already; you are in danger of death anyhow as it is; you will never recover from a scourging."

I, with all a delirious man's unreasoning, insisted and again threatened to give myself up.

The sun was about two hours high, gilding the treetops and sending shafts of golden light through the still wet foliage. One such shaft of sunshine shot between the two halves of the great rock that sheltered us and fell on the table-topped fragment of stone, like a nearly buried altar, which lay midway of them.

Writhing and groaning I slipped out of my quilt, cloak and tunic, and, groaning, I crawled to the flat-topped stone. Face down on it I lay, my chest against it, my knees on the ground, my arms outstretched, my fingers gripping the far edge of the altar-stone.

So placed I bade Agathemer lay on with the scourge.

"Flay me!" I ordered. "I should be torn raw from neck to hips. The worse I am scored and ripped the more protection the scars will be. Lay on furiously. If I faint, finish the job before you revive me."

He began lashing me, but hesitatingly; I reviled him for a coward; but the pain, even of the first strokes, was too much for me. I could feel the sweat on my forehead, my finger nails dug into the sides of the stone, its sharp edge cut into the soft inside of my clutching fingers, I bit my tongue to keep from shrieking, yet my voice, as I taunted Agathemer and railed at him, rose to a sort of scream.

He laid on more fiercely. After a dozen blows or more a harder blow made me groan. At that instant I was aware of a shadow above me, of a human figure rushing past me, and the blows ceased.

I let go my clutch on the rock and tried to stand up. I did succeed in kneeling up, supported by my hand on the altar stone. So half erect I looked round.

Agathemer lay under the intruder, who had him by the throat with both hands. Partly by sight, even from behind him, partly by the objurgation which he panted out, I recognized Chryseros Philargyrus and realized that he thought that Agathemer had been torturing me in revenge for his flogging at Nemestronia's.

I instantly forgot my plight and my natural instincts asserted themselves. As if I had been then what I had been ten days before, I ordered Chryseros to loose Agathemer and he obeyed me, as if I had been what I felt myself, his master.

He and Agathemer stood up and looked at me and each other: I must have made a laughable spectacle, swaying as I knelt, my hands on the rock, my hair and beard mere clipped stubble, and I naked, with my back bleeding and both shoulders and one hip inflamed, purple-red and puffy. Certainly both Chryseros and Agathemer appeared comical to me, even in my pain and misery and weakness and through the enveloping horror of my fever. Agathemer, his hair and beard a worse stubble than mine, was gasping and ruefully rubbing his throat, making a ridiculous figure in his brown tunic, patched with patches of red, yellow and blue, all sewed on with white thread. Chryseros was panting, and his bald head shone in the sun. He had cast off his cloak as he rushed at Agathemer and stood only in his rusty brown tunic, himself as dry and lean as a dead limb of a tree.

Although he had obeyed instantly when I ordered him to loose Agathemer, yet, perhaps from some vagary of my fever, I stared at Chryseros without any other feeling than that he had been for most of his life the tenant of our family enemy. As I looked at him I felt

utterly lost, as if there was now no hope for me, as if Chryseros would certainly betray me to the authorities. I felt utterly despairing and totally reckless. This mood, oddly enough, urged me to do the very best thing I could have done.

Either from right instinct or delirious folly, I informed Chryseros fully of our purposes, doings and plans. He apologized to Agathemer for his assault on him, affirmed his complete loyalty to me and promised all possible assistance and perfect secrecy. He examined me and said:

"I'll have your wounds clean, your back dried up, every inch of you healing properly and your fever cooled before morning. Here, Agathemer, help get him abed."

They washed my back and laid me, naked as I was, on the quilt laid over the bed of leaves, then they covered me with the other quilt.

"You two keep close till I come back," Chryseros advised. "Someone else might use this path. I'll be back soon and I'll arrange to excite no suspicion."

When he returned he had me out on the flat-topped stone, washed my back and wounds, and then bathed them with some lotion which, when first applied, felt cooling and soothing, but almost at once burnt into me till every part of my back, my hip and both my shoulders smarted worse than had the one shoulder as the brand seared it: at least that was how I felt. I writhed and groaned.

"Keep still!" Chryseros admonished me. "Keep quiet! This is doing you good."

And he chafed my back, inundating it with his fiery liniment till I was on the verge of fainting from mere pain. Half fainting I was as the two raised me to my feet and put the tunic on me, as they helped me back to my bed in the little grotto. When I was recumbent Chryseros made me drink a nauseous, black, bitter liquid and then lie flat.

"Keep there till morning," he said, "and fast. Food can do you no good while you have such a fever and fasting can do you no harm."

Actually I was asleep before I knew it and slept all day and all night, not waking until Agathemer, when Chryseros ordered it, roused me. They pressed on me a quart bowl of milk warm from the cow, and I drank most of it. I felt much better and Chryseros pronounced me free from fever and after he had inspected my back and wounds and again inundated them with his fiery lotion, declared all inflammation had vanished and that I was healing up properly. He enjoined Agathemer to let me have no food but milk,

said he would bring more after sunset, and told us to keep close in the niche. I slept all day long, and after a second draught of milk at dusk, all night till the sun was well up.

I woke feeling stiff and sore, uncomfortable on my back, hip and shoulders, but with no positive pain anywhere: also I felt like my usual self. And I may say here, parenthetically, that I never had another day's illness through all the vicissitudes of my flight, hiding, adventures and misfortunes.

Chryseros brought me milk; excellent wheat bread; a smooth and appetizing veal-stew, with beans and lentils in it and seasoned with spices; cheese newly made from fresh curds, and luscious plums. He let me eat my fill and drink all the milk I wanted. But he would not let me taste the wine of which Agathemer drank moderately.

"If you feel sleepy," said Chryseros, "roll over, cover yourself and go to sleep; we can talk tomorrow."

"I do not feel sleepy," I declared, "and I feel very much like asking questions."

"Then we'll talk at once," he said, "we'll take all the time needed for your recovery; but once you are recovered, we'll waste no time in getting you out of Sabinum."

The morning was fair and warm, with a light breeze. I was on my bed of leaves inside my nook of rock. Agathemer was squatted by my head, his back against that edge of the niche; by my feet, leaning against the opposite edge of the niche, facing Agathemer, and therefore where I could best see and hear him sat Chryseros.

He began by telling me that I must remain where I was until he judged me fit to travel, even if I remained ten days more; but that he thought I might be able to start to-morrow night and would make his preparations accordingly. His first idea, he said, had been to set off on horseback for Spolitum, near, which he had a sister married to a prosperous farmer, to whom he had paid visits at intervals of about five years. He had thought that it would be easy and safe to take me and Agathemer with him on foot, disguised as slaves. This idea, however, Agathemer had antagonized, pointing out that any convoy from my estate would be severely scrutinized and every man examined and searched; that there was no chance of our escaping by such a plan.

At this point of his discourse he told me that the Praetorians had already departed from Villa Andivia leaving in charge Gratillus, a treasury officer of the confiscation department, a man whom I knew too well as also a member of the secret service, an articulated Imperial spy and an active professional informer, moreover a man who had always hated my uncle, and who had hated me from my boyhood.

According to Chryseros, Gratillus had made no great effort to find me, since, in fact, neither he nor anyone connected with the government had had any suspicion that I had returned home. He had merely made a perfunctory investigation to assure himself, as he thought, that I had not so returned. He had examined all the tenantry and slaves, had asked questions, but had tortured no one and had been quite satisfied with the answers he had received. Oddly enough, while he had closely questioned himself and my other eight tenants as to the date of my departure for Rome and as to whether they had seen me since they last saw me in Rome, and while he had questioned Uteria and Ofatulena as to whether they had seen me since I set off for Rome, he had somehow omitted or forgotten to ask Ofatulus the same questions, so that he had been able to answer truthfully the only questions asked of him. Agathemer, I found, had told Chryseros that only he and Ofatulus had seen me between my return and escape.

Gratillus had especially questioned the wives of my eight tenants, and as Chryseros was a widower, his widowed daughter, who lived with him. Each of these he had summoned before him separately and had interrogated alone and at length. This was like Gratillus.

He had made but one arrest, and this dumbfounded me. Ducconius Furfur had been interrogated, like all my neighbors, but, while the rest had been dismissed after answering what questions were put to them, Furfur, with two servants, had accompanied to Rome the Praetorians when they went away.

The more I reflected on this the stranger it seemed.

Neither Chryseros nor Agathemer had any doubt that a close watch was being quietly kept to make sure that I could not now return to Villa Andivia without being caught; nor yet leave it if I did return or had returned.

As a result of his discussion with Agathemer they had agreed that we were to leave by night and on foot, as we had originally intended. But he had argued that, while it was perfectly sensible for us to plan to pass ourselves off as runaway slaves if arrested and questioned, there was no sense whatever in doing anything to appear like runaway slaves unless we were actually arrested and questioned. Agathemer had admitted this, but had pointed out that, while we had no hope of any assistance whatever, and were planning to escape by our own unaided efforts, there was no possibility of our trying to appear anything else than runaway slaves, as he could easily steal slaves' cloaks and tunics from my spare stores, but had no hope of getting his hands on any other garments. He had joyfully accepted the ideas and suggestions which Chryseros put forward, as well as his proffers of assistance.

Chryseros directed that the two copper cylinders and most of the spoils of Agathemer's pilferings should be left in our little grotto, hidden under the dead leaves. He would then smuggle them away and dispose of them. He would supply us with rusty brown tunics and cloaks of undyed mixed wool, such as were worn by poor or economical farmers throughout Sabinum. Also he would supply us with hats better than those Agathemer had fetched; belts; and travelling wallets, neither too big nor too small, neither too new nor too worn, and each with a shoulder-strap for easy carriage; good, heavy shoes, two pair of them for each of us, so that we might carry a spare pair in each wallet. In the wallets also we were to hide the hunting knives Agathemer had taken from my uncle's collection; which knives, blades, handles and sheaths Chryseros highly approved.

At sight of the flageolet he grinned, the only smile I saw on his face while he was helping us in our hiding and out of it. Agathemer, obstinately, insisted on taking that flageolet. And Chryseros grudgingly admitted that it might prove a really valuable possession, perhaps. We took, of course, our two little flint and steel cases.

Chryseros said we ought to eat all we could manage to swallow up to the moment of our departure. He would pack our wallets with food which could be made to last four or five days and would be plenty for two days. Most important of all he would supply us with money, half copper and half silver, as much as our wallets could properly hold, so as not to make us appear thieves, if we were suspected and haled before a magistrate. With money we could travel openly and by day after we were well out of Sabinum.

We planned to make our way eastward, inclining very little to the north, towards Fisterinae. The crossing of the Tolenus and Himella should give us no trouble whatever. We would pass south of Cliternia and north of Fisterinae. Chryseros questioned Agathemer closely as to his knowledge of the byroads, and applauded him highly, only on a few points correcting him or amplifying what he knew. North of Fisterinae we could gain the mountains and work northwards.

The most dangerous part of our proposed route, the critical point of our escape, would be the crossing of the Avers and the Salarian Highway, which we must effect somewhere near Forum Decii, between Interocrium and Falacrinum. Once in the mountains we should be able easily to continue on northwards into Umbria.

Chryseros suggested that, once in Umbria, we could pass ourselves off as buyers of cattle, goats and mules, all of which were bred on the mountain farms and regularly bought up by itinerant dealers who drove them or had them driven to Rome. The Umbrian mountains had no such numbers of these animals as Sabinum produced and their quality was far inferior, so that the dealers were always men of small means, driving close bargains.

All this sounded very promising and, about half way between sunrise and noon, he left us to hide for the rest of the day. I slept well and woke feeling almost myself, with merely trifling discomfort from my fast healing wounds.

When Chryseros returned in the dusk, I ate ravenously. He brought us good, coarse tunics and cloaks, also hats, shoes, and belts; and for each of us, a small leather case containing two good needles and a little hank of strong linen thread. We talked in subdued tones, as before, and kept it up until long after dark.

Next morning I woke full of hope and eager to be off. Chryseros brought our wallets and we packed them with everything they were to hold except most of the food. We had a long wrangle over the money, as Chryseros wanted to force on us more silver than I thought it safe to carry.

That night, after a generous meal and a long final talk with Chryseros, we set off to sneak our way into the Aemilian Estate and from there eastward. Before we set off Chryseros insisted on hanging round each of our necks, by the usual leathern thong, one of those tiny, flat leathern pouches, in which slaves were accustomed to wear protective amulets. He declared that these contained talismans of great potency and of inestimable value to us in our flight, as in any risk or venture. At the moment of parting, to my amazement, he burst into tears, threw his arms around me, held me close and clung to me sobbing, and kissing me as if I had been his own son. As we moved off I could still hear his sobs.

We had excellent luck. Hiding by day and threading devious paths by night we reached and passed the Avens and the Salarian Highway without any encounter with any human being; and indeed without near proximity to any. Our daytime hiding-places all turned out to have been well chosen and no one approached us in any one of them. The moon, which was in her first quarter on the night of our setting out, helped us nightly. There was no rain and only some moderate cloudiness, enough to be helpful at the time of the full moon, when there was enough light all night for us to see to travel at a good rate of speed and without any error at forks in the paths; and yet not enough light to make us conspicuous to any who might be abroad late at night.

Once beyond the Nar and almost at the borders of Umbria, we grew bolder, travelled by day, bought food as we needed it, put up at inns and acted the character we had assumed, of Sabines intent on stock-buying in the Umbrian mountains. No one appeared to suspect us and we had no adventures.

But, inevitably, once we had escaped, we did not so much think of immediate danger as of permanent safety. Chryseros had confirmed our instinctive opinion that, as Sabines, we should be much less likely to arouse suspicion in Umbria and the Po Valley than in Samnium, Lucania or Bruttium. We had never thought of escape southward; northward we had meant to work our way, from the instant of conceiving the idea of escaping. But we had no settled, coherent plan as to how to achieve safety and keep alive. We could not hide in the mountains indefinitely.

We both agreed that we could hide best in a large city. Marseilles might have been a perfect hiding-place could we have reached it, full as it always was of riff-raff from all the shores of the Mediterranean and from all parts of Italy. But Marseilles we could reach only by the Aurelian Highway, through Genoa along the coast, and the Aurelian Highway was certain to be sown with spies and likely enough might be travelled upon by officials who had known me from childhood and would probably know me through any disguise.

Aquileia, on the other hand, was far more populous than Marseilles, even more a congeries of rabble from all shores and districts, even more easy-going. In Aquileia we should be able to earn a comfortable living by not too onerous activities and to be wholly unsuspected. Towards Aquileia we decided to try to make our way. The roads, being less travelled, would be less spied-on and we should meet officials less likely to recognize me.

But, if we were to reach Aquileia, we must husband our silver. Agathemer's idea was that, from where we reached the borders of Umbria, somewhere between Trebia and Nursia, we should keep as near as possible to the chine of the mountain-chain, using the roads, paths, tracks or trails highest up the slope of the mountains; avoiding being seen as much as possible, and, if we were seen, claiming to have lost our way through misunderstanding the directions given us by the last natives we had met. He proposed to steal food for us, instead of buying it, and expounded his ideas, maintaining that it would be easy and not dangerous.

We tried his plan and succeeded well with it. So wild and untravelled were the districts which we traversed that, nearly half the time, we were welcomed at farmsteads, (to which welcome Agathemer's flageolet-playing greatly assisted us), invited to spend the night and had lavished upon our entertainment all their rustic abundance, so that we visibly grew fat. When such luck did not befall us we had no trouble in helping ourselves to supplies, for, far up the mountains, most habitations were shacks tenanted only in summer and only by lads acting as goat-herds or herdsmen, who spent the day abroad with their charges, so that we could readily enter their deserted cabins and take what we

pleased; especially as, if a dog had been left to guard the hut, I could always master him so that he greeted me fawning and stood wagging his tail as we made off.

Except these not very risky raids for provender and such encounters as called for more than usually ingenious lying from Agathemer, we had no adventures.

But we realized from day to day and more and more insistently, that we were progressing slowly, far slower than we had anticipated. It was plain that we could not hope to reach Aquileia before winter set in. It was manifest that it would be unsafe to attempt to winter anywhere in the Po valley between the mountains and Aquileia. At Ravenna, Bononia or Padua we should be noticed, investigated and perhaps recognized: anywhere in the open country, at any village or farm, we should, even more certainly excite suspicion. We must winter in the mountains. But how or where?

The question was solved for us by our first considerable adventure. I never knew the precise locality. We had, in traversing the mountains trails, avoided any semblance of ignorance of our general locality and had sedulously refrained from asking any questions except as to our way to some nearby objective, generally imaginary. All I know is that we were somewhere on the northeastern slope of the long chain of mountains beyond Iguvium and Tifernum perhaps near the headwaters of the Sena. On the morning of our adventure we were on a long spur of the main range, so that we were headed not northwest but northeast. The weather was still fine and warm, but autumn was not far off. We hadn't seen a habitation since that at which we had passed the night, and we had made about three leagues since we left it, following what was at first a good mountain road, but which grew worse and worse till it became a mere trail.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XIII THE LONELY HUT

Some time before noon we were threading a barely visible track not far below the crest of the spur, a track bordered and overshadowed by chestnuts and beeches, but chestnuts and beeches intermingled with not a few pines and firs, when, out of the bushes on our left hand, from the up slope above us, appeared a large mouse-colored Molossian dog, very lean and starved looking. I first saw his big, square-jowled, short-muzzled head peering out between some low cornel bushes, his brown eyes regarding me questioningly.

He fawned on me, of course, and I made friends with him, fondled him, pulled his ears and played with him a while.

Agathemer tartly enquired whether we really had time to waste on skylarking with strange dogs. I laughed, picked up my wallet, and started to follow him as he swung round and strode on, ordering the dog to go back home, a command which, from me, almost always won instant compliance and disembarrassed me of any casual roadside friends.

But the dog did not obey. He pawed at me, whined, and caught my cloak in his teeth, tugging at it and whining. I could not induce him to let go, could not shake him off, and was much puzzled. Agathemer, impatient and irritated, halted again and urged our need of haste.

After exhausting every wile by which I had been accustomed to rid myself of too fond animals, I began to realize that the dog did not want to follow us, did not want us to remain where we were and go on playing with him, but, as plainly as if he spoke Latin, he was begging us to accompany him somewhere.

I said to Agathemer:

"I'm going with this dog; come along."

He remonstrated.

I declared that I had an intuition that to follow the dog was the right thing to do. Agathemer, contemptuous and reluctant, yielded. The dog led us along an all but

undistinguishable track through densely growing trees, up steep slopes and out into a flattish glade or clearing at the brow of the slope, overhung by merely a few hundred feet of wooded mountain side and bare cliffs to the crest. The clearing was clothed in soft, late, second-growth grass, and had plainly been mown at haying time and pastured on since. In it we found some well-built, well-thatched farm-buildings: a sheepfold, a goatpen, a cowshed, a strongly built structure like a granary or store-house, another like a repository for wine-jars and oil-jars; hovels such as all mountain farms have for slave-quarters and a house or cabin little better than a hut, mud-walled, like the other buildings, but new thatched. It was nearly square and had no ridge-pole, the four slopes of the roof running together, at the top, yet not into a point, but as if there were a smoke-vent: in fact I thought I saw a suggestion of smoke rising from the peak of the roof.

To this hut the dog led us. The heavy door of weathered, rough-hewn oak was shut, but, when I pushed it, proved to be unfastened. I found myself looking into a largish room, roofed with rough rafters from which hung what might have been hams, flitches and cheeses. It was mud-walled and had a floor of beaten earth, in which was a sand-pit, nearly full of ashes and with a small fire smouldering in the middle of it. Opposite me was a rough plank partition with two doors in it, both open. Against the partition, between the doors, hung bronze lamps, iron pots and pottery jars. The room was dim, lighted only from the door, in which I stood, and from the narrow smoke-vent overhead.

By the fire, on their hands and knees, and apparently poking at it, each with a bit of wood, or about to lay the bits of wood on it, were two little girls, shock-headed, barefoot and bare-legged, clad only in coarse tunics of rusty dark wool. I am not accurate as to children's ages: I took these girls for seven and five; but they may have been six and four or eight and six. At sight of us they scrambled to their feet and fled through one of the doors, one shrieking, the other screaming:

"Mamma! Mamma! Strange men! Strange men!"

In her panic she did not attempt to shut the door behind her and bolt it, both of which, as I afterwards discovered, she might have done.

No other voices came to our ears and I followed the children into the rear room in which they had taken refuge. It was totally dark, except for what light found its way through its door, and was cramped and small and half filled by a Gallic bed. I had never seen a Gallic bed before. Such a bed is made like the body of a travelling-carriage or travelling litter, entirely encased in panelling, topped off with a sort of flat roof of panelling, and with sliding panels above the level of the cording, so that the occupants can shut themselves in completely; a structure which looks to a novice like a device for

smothering its occupants, but which is a welcome retreat and shelter on cold, windy, winter nights, as I have learned by later experience. As this was my first sight of one I was amazed at it.

Usually, as I learned later, such a bedstead is piled up with feather- beds, so that the occupant is much above the level of the top edge of the lower front on which the panels slide. But this bed was poorly provided with mattresses and I had to stare down into it to descry the children's mother, who lay like a corpse in a coffin, but half buried in bedding and quilts, only her face visible. She was certainly alive, for her breathing was loud and stertorous; but she was, quite certainly, unconscious. Between the shrieking children, who clung to the frame of the bed, I spoke to her and assured her that we were friends. She gave no sign of understanding me, of hearing me, of knowing of my presence; but my repeated assurances quieted the elder girl, who not only ceased screaming but endeavored to calm her little sister.

Seeing her so sensible, I questioned the child. All I could learn from her was that her father had been away nearly ten days, her mother ill for five and insensible for three and their four slaves had run away the day before, taking everything they chose to carry off. I then examined the other room which had a similar bed in it, and in which, the child told me, she and her sister slept. She declared that she did not know her mother's name, that her father never called her anything but "mother"; she also declared that she did not know her father's name, her mother, always calling him "father," as she and her sister did. Her name was Prima and her sister's Secunda.

As I could not rouse the woman and learned that the slaves had been gone more than a full day, Agathemer and I went to save the bellowing and bleating stock. We found in the shed two fine young cows with udders appallingly distended. But our attention was momentarily distracted from them by the sight of eight full-sized bronze pails, finer than those at any public well in Reate or Consentia, which hung on pegs by the door, four on each side of it. They were flat-bottomed, bulged, but narrowed at the rim so that no water would splash out in carrying. The rims were ornamented with chased or cast patterns, scallops, leaves, egg and dart and wall of Troy: four patterns, showing that they were pairs. All had heavy double handles. We looked for carrying-yokes, but could see none. Such pails, which would be the treasures of any village and the pride of most towns, amazed us in this fastness. Glancing at the pails took us less time than it does to tell of it. The cows needed us sorely and we each picked up one of the suitable earthenware jars which stood inverted just inside the shed door and milked them at once. Agathemer said he thought we were in time to forestall any serious and permanent harm to them. But their udders were frightfully swelled and blood came with the milk from one teat of the cow I attended to.

The sheep were in a worse state than the cows. Not a lamb was visible; besides the ewes there was only a two-year-old ram penned by himself in a corner of the fold. There were eight fine young ewes, in full milk. As with one cow, so among these ewes, four gave bloody milk from one teat each, and we milked that onto the earth. We found plenty of empty earthenware crocks, clean, and turned upside down, in which to save the good milk.

The he-goat, a noble young specimen, was penned by himself, like the ram. There were nineteen she-goats, with not a kid anywhere, yet all in full milk and far worse off than the ewes. All but two gave bloody milk and three gave no clean milk. These three I judged might die, but Agathemer vowed he could save them.

When we had finished milking we searched about for water. Towards the northeast the clearing narrowed and here we came upon a tiny rill trickling through a fringe of sedge. It came from a clear and abundant spring in a cleft of rock against the sharp up slope which rose there under the pines. At the lower edge of that part of the clearing, near the margin of the more nearly level ground, just before it plunged over the rim of the flat, it was dammed into a drinking pool for the stock. We did not dare let them out to drink and so laboriously carried water, I from the spring and Agathemer from the pond, using each a pair of the bronze pails, pouring the water into the troughs made of hollow logs, which were set, one to each, in the shed, pen and fold. We kept this up till every goat and ewe had had her fill, and then watered the he-goat and ram. The cows, of course, we had watered first. After the watering we gave each cow a feed of mixed barley and millet and then filled with hay all the mangers and racks.

When we had concluded this exhausting toil we filled the water-jar which stood in one corner of the cabin and then carried some milk into the house, and offered Prima and Secunda whichever they preferred. They chose ewe's milk and drank their fill. Prima was much impressed by the dog's confidence in me and seemed to give me hers. She said the dog's name was Hylactor. I tried to make the mother drink some cow's milk, but she swallowed only a few drops which I forced through her teeth by the help of a small horn spoon which I found on the floor of the outer room.

Agathemer roused the fire and piled more wood on it. There were no less than seven tripods lying about the floor of the cabin, but all roughly made and of the squat, short-legged pattern which holds a pot barely clear of a low bed of coals; not one was fit to hold a cauldron over a newly made deep fire of half-caught wood.

On the tallest of them, or rather on that least squatty, Agathemer set a small pot, which he filled with fresh water. When he had this where it seemed likely to boil and certain to heat, he ferretted about for supplies. He found a brick oven with about half a baking of

bread in it; medium-sized loaves of coarse wheat bread. Two forked sticks stood in one corner of the cabin and with one he lifted from its peg in the rafters a partly used flitch of good coarse bacon. There was a jar more than half full of olive oil by the sticks in the same corner of the cabin. In a small pot set in the ashes Agathemer stewed some of the onions he lifted down from the rafters. In the other corner of the cabin was an amphora nearly full of harsh, sour wine. We made a full meal of bread, onions, bacon, olives and some raisins, drinking our fill of the wine. The little girls ate heartily with us, now convinced that we were friends and accepting us as such. They seemed to some extent habituated to their mother's condition of helplessness and insensibility.

As soon as we had fed we inspected the place. The glade or clearing was enclosed all around by the tall trees of a thick primitive forest. Towards the up slope and the cliffs below the crest of the mountain the trees were all pines, firs or such-like dark and somber evergreens. There were a few of these also on the lower slopes, but there, as along all that rim of the clearing, the forest was mostly of oak, beech, chestnut and other cheerful trees. Their tops towered far above the verge of the slope and screened the clearing all round. Nowhere could we catch sight of any sign of a town, village or farmstead, though there were three several rifts in the forest through which we could see far into the valleys to the eastward. The cliff above the clearing ran nearly from southwest to northeast, so that the place was well situated towards the sun.

The cow-shed was divided by a partition and half of it had been used for stabling mules. Agathemer judged that no mule had been in it for about ten days. We inferred that the children's father had taken the mules with him when he departed. Over the cow-shed was a loft, well stored with good hay, as were the smaller lofts over the sheds which formed one side of the sheepfold and goat-pen. The hay was not mountain hay, but distinctly meadow hay, such as is mown in valleys along streams. It was all in bundles, such bundles as are carried on mule-back, two to a mule. This was queer; even queerer the absence of any fowls or pigeons, or of any sign that any had ever been about the place. An Umbrian mountain farm without pigeons was unthinkable.

In the granary we found an amazingly large store of excellent barley, but only two jars of wheat, and that not very good, and neither jar entirely full. On the floor were loose piles of turnips, beets and of dried pods of coarse beans. There were jars of chick-peas, cow-peas, lentils, beans and millet, more millet than wheat. From the rafters hung dried bean-bushes, with the pods on; long strings of onions, dried herbs, marjoram, thyme, sage, bay-leaves and other such seasonings, dried peppers, strung like the onions, and bunches of big sweet raisins. Also many rush-mats of dried figs, the biggest and best of figs, some of them indubitably Caenean figs. On the floor, in heaps, were some hard-headed cabbages, only one or two spoiled. It was a very ample store and we marvelled at it and wondered whence it all came and how it came where it was.

The other store-house amazed us. It was, as we had conjectured, full of great jars; jars of wine, of olive oil, of pickled olives, of pickled fish, of pickled pork, of vinegar, of plums in vinegar, and smaller jars of honey, sauces and prepared relishes. The rafters were set full of cornel-wood pegs till they looked like weavers-combs. From the pegs hung hams, flitches, strings of smoked sausage, cheeses of all sizes, smoked so heavily that they appeared mere lumps of soot, and bags of a shape unfamiliar to both of us. Agathemer knocked one down and opened it. It was full of tight packed fish, salted, dried and smoked, a fish of a kind unknown to us.

There was, along the upper edge of the clearing, under the boughs of the pine trees, a huge pile of trimmed logs of oak, chestnut, pine and fir, with a scarcely smaller heap of cut lengths of boughs and branches. Under a lean-to shed was a small store of cut fire-wood. In a corner of the same shed were four big cornel-wood mauls and eleven good iron wedges, not one of them bearing any sign of ever having been used, but appearing as if fresh from the maker's hands. By the woodpile were four even heavier mauls, showing plenty of marks of hard usage and near them or about the woodpile we found eight rusty wedges.

We could find no axe, hatchet or any other such tool anywhere about the place. The logs and six-foot lengths of boughs afforded a lavish supply of fuel for two long winters; the cut fire-wood could not be made to keep the fire going ten days.

The slave-quarters, as I said, were mere hovels, but they were provided with bedding, quilts, and stores of clothing by no means such as are generally used for slaves. Slaves' quilts are mostly old and worn, made of patches of woollen or linen cloth all but worn out by previous use; and then, when torn, patched with a patch on a patch and a patch on that. These quilts were the best of their kind, such as ladies of leisure make for their own amusement, of squares and triangles of woollen stuff unworn and unsoiled. The mattresses were stuffed with dried grass or sedge, craftily packed to make a soft bed for any sleeper. The pillows were of lambs' wool, as good as the best pillows. And, in a big chest in each hovel, were good, new, clean tunics, cloaks, rain-cloaks, and with them sandals, shoes, hats, rain-hats and all sorts of clothing, not as if for slaves, but as if for middle-class farmers, prosperous and self-indulgent.

We were dumbfounded at such abundance in such a place.

By each bed in the hut was a chest. These we opened and found in both women's clothing; tunics, robes, cloaks and rolls of linen and fine woollen stuffs.

The woman, although moaning and stirring in her bed, gave no more signs of life than when we first saw her. Agathemer said, speaking Greek so the children would not understand:

"We must try to save this woman's life. You manage to get the children to follow you outside and I'll lift her out of the bed, and wash her, put a clean tunic on her, put clean bedding in the bed and put her back in it; I can do all that handily. She is so ill she will never know."

We went out in the slave-hovels and chose what bedding seemed suitable and carried it into the hut. Agathemer had put more fuel on the fire and set a big pot of water on the tripod. We put the bedding in a corner of the hut and selected from the contents of the chests a tunic and some rough towels, of which there were some in each chest.

I was not hopeful of being able to wheedle the children; but my first attempt was a complete success. I suggested to Prima that she tell me the names of the sheep and goats and she at once became absorbed in instructing me. Each had a name, she was certain; but, I found, very uncertain as to which name belonged to which and not very sure of some of the names. Her hesitations and efforts to remember took up so much time that we were still at the goat-pen, Secunda with one hand clinging confidently to mine, when Agathemer called to me from the door of the hut.

He told me in Greek that he had done all he could for the woman, had effaced all traces of his activities and had put the soiled bedding out in the late sunshine to dry and air. We strolled about the clearing, remarking again that it seemed out of sight from any possible inhabited or travelled viewpoint. Agathemer fetched a rough ladder he had seen in the cow-shed, set it against the hut, which was highest on the slope, and climbed to the top of its roof. From there, he said, he could descry nothing in any direction which looked like a town, village, farmstead or bit of highway. The place was well hidden, by careful calculation, for this could not have come about by accident.

We peered into each of the buildings and poked about in them, hoping to find an axe or hatchet, and marvelling that a place so liberally, so lavishly, so amazingly oversupplied with hams, flitches, sausages and other such food should show nowhere any trace of the presence of hogs. There was no hog-pen nor any place where one might have been, nor did any part of the clearing show any signs indicating a former wallow, nor had any portion of it been rooted up. It was very puzzling.

As we returned to the house, about an hour before sunset, we simultaneously uttered, in Greek:

"Here we stay—"

"Go on," said I checking.

"Here we stay," he began again, "until the husband comes home, or, if he does not return, until spring."

"That is my idea, also," I said, "and there is but one drawback."

"Pooh," said Agathemer, "if we do not find an axe somewhere hereabouts I'll steal one from a farm if I have to spend two days and a night on the quest."

We agreed that there was no question but that we must spend the night where we were. The stock, after their long neglect and late milking, would be best left un milked and unwatered till morning. As we must not leave the woman unwatched, we must sleep in the hut. We could bring in sedge mattresses and quilts from the hovels and sleep on the earth floor by the fire. When we had agreed on these points we forced some more milk on the semi-unconscious woman, gave the stock more hay, ate an abundant meal of bread, oil, sausages broiled over the fire on a spit, olives and raisins; and, soon after sunset, composed ourselves to sleep by the well-covered fire, leaving open the door into the woman's bedroom, but shutting the two children into theirs after telling them by no means to stir until we called them in the morning.

Hylactor curled up outside the cabin door, almost against it, after Agathemer had convinced him that we would not let him sleep in the hut. We slept unbrokenly till dawn woke us.

It was cold before sunrise so high up the mountains. My face felt cold even inside the hut and by the smouldering fire. I was reluctant to roll out of my quilts. But, what with Agathemer's urgings and my own realization of what was required, I did my share of the milking, watering and feeding of the stock and ate a hearty breakfast. For, as when hiding in Furfur's woods, as when anywhere on our escape, since it was not possible to eat as if at home and at ease, we ate our fill soon after dawn and again before dark, but during the day we ate nothing. We had from necessity already formed the habit of two meals a day, at sunrise and sunset.

The woman seemed less violently ill than the day before. When we first saw her she had been in the throes of a violent fever and it had lasted until after Agathemer bathed her. From then on it seemed to abate, but, when I last felt her forehead and hands before we lay down to sleep, she was still feverish. When we first went to her in the morning she was unconscious and as if in a stupor, but showed no signs of fever. She did not struggle

against feeding as on the previous day, but swallowed, a spoonful at a time, as much milk as Agathemer thought good for her.

When we had done what seemed necessary Agathemer suggested that I remain by the cabin while he investigated the woods round the clearing to make sure how many roads or paths led out of it. He proposed to carry his sheath-knife and the stout and tried staff which had helped him along the mountain trails, as a similar one had helped me, and to take Hylactor with him: to make a circuit about the clearing some ten yards or so inside the forest and, if necessary a second circuit, further away from our glade. These two circuits should make him sure how many tracks led from or to our clearing. Then he would follow each track and acquaint himself with it, and, if possible, learn where it led. I approved.

Before noon he reported that only three tracks approached our location; that by which we had reached it up the slope of the mountain, and one along the slope in each direction. About mid-afternoon he returned up the track by which we had come, stating that the trail southwards, about a league south of us, joined the road along which we had travelled till Hylactor diverted us: he had made the circuit along the length of the league or more of trail, back along the road by which we had travelled and up the track by which Hylactor had led us; he had met no living thing, save a hare or two, too fleet for Hylactor to catch; he had caught sight of no town, village or farmstead, even afar. He had made sure that the mules had left the clearing by the track he had followed out of it, so that, probably, the children's father had gone south. Exploring the other trail he had put off till the next day.

Next day he found that the other track joined the lower road only about half a league to northeastwards. He turned back along the lower road and returned by the uphill track, as he had done the day before to the south. He met no one and saw no town, village or farmstead anywhere in sight, and at some places he could see far to the eastward.

We discussed his proposal to go off alone, with a wallet of food and try to steal an axe. Plainly he would have to go far. It would be easy enough to sneak back to the farm where we had spent our last night before meeting Hylactor, but we both felt bound by the obligation of our hospitable entertainment there: though nameless fugitives we were still under the spell of the standards of our former lives. We admitted to each other that he might steal an axe from that farm and I condone the knavery and avail myself of its proceeds; but we agreed that such baseness must be stooped to only as a desperate last resort. He was to set off northwards next day.

That night the woman, who had been inert and manageable, in a half-stupor, became violently delirious and for a time it took all the strength Agathemer and I jointly

possessed to hold her in bed. Prima and Secunda, waked by her shrieks, were in a pitiable panic, Secunda merely dazed and aghast, Prima begging us not to kill her mother, fancying we were attacking her. We managed to convince the child that we were doing our best and what was best for her mother and that her mother's ravings would quiet and that she might regain her reason and health. I induced both children to return to their bed and shut and bolted their door. Agathemer and I, by turns, and twice again each helping the other, kept the poor woman in her bed all night. At dawn she quieted and fell into a profound stupor. But the vigil left me and Agathemer worn out. We attended to the milking, feeding and watering of the stock and then I went to sleep in one of the slave hovels, which were free from vermin, not the least amazing of the many amazing features of our place of sojourn.

This outbreak of our insensible hostess made impossible the immediate execution of Agathemer's project. He had to have adequate rest before he could set off. After I had slept all the morning, he slept most of the afternoon. During his nap I found, behind the water-jar in the hut, a hatchet-head, with the handle broken off and what was left of it jammed in the hole. It was small, but not very rusty or dull. Before Agathemer awakened I had it well sharpened. We had found a mallet in the storehouse, and, with this and a cornel-wood peg he whittled with his sheath-knife, Agathemer drove out the broken bit of hatchet handle. He then fashioned with his sheath-knife a good handle of tough, seasoned ash from a piece he had found in one of the buildings. With this hatchet we could cut up small boughs selected from the big woodpile, but it was too small to enable us to cut logs into lengths or split lengths of logs.

Again, when Agathemer was planning for the next day his axe-stealing expedition, the woman had a fit of raving. This lasted a night, a day and a night and left both of us to the last degree weary and drowsy. Before we had recuperated our firewood was almost used up. The situation looked hopeless. It was well along into the Autumn, though we were now unsure of what month we were in, so completely had we lost count of the days. Again Agathemer projected an expedition for the next day, in the faint hope of obtaining us an axe, and I feared he now aimed for our last harborage. At dusk, as he hunted for small wood under the margin of the woodpile, he found a good, big, double-edged axe-head. It was dull and very rusty, and he had a vast deal of trouble getting out the fragment of broken handle and shaping a new handle, in which he was greatly helped by a fairly good draw-knife, which I had that very morning found hanging on a peg behind the hay in the loft over the cow-shed. He had quite as much trouble in fitting the handle into the axe-head and in sharpening both edges. But he did all that before we composed ourselves to sleep. Besides those on the partition we had found a score of fine bronze lamps and we had olive oil enough for all uses for two winters.

Next morning we woke to find all our world buried under a foot of snow, the pines laden with it, the boughs of the beeches, oaks and chestnuts furred with it along their tops. It was a magic outlook, the like of which neither of us had ever seen.

After that, all through the winter, our life was an unvarying routine of milking, feeding and watering the stock, preparing and eating meals limited only by our appetites, nursing the sick woman, and chopping firewood. From the first streak of dawn till the last gleam of twilight one or the other of us chopped the firewood. Neither of us was an adept at handling an axe. But Agathemer, with his half Greek ancestry and his wholly Greek versatility and adaptability, taught himself to be a good axeman in ten days. I bungled and blundered away at it all winter. Agathemer could cut a two-foot oak log into suitable lengths with a minimum of effort, with clean, effective strokes of the ringing axe, the cuts sharp and even; I could cut any log into lengths and enjoyed the effort, but I sweated over it and laid half my strokes awry, so that the ends of my lengths were notched and unsightly.

Also I broke five several axe-helves in the course of the winter. The first time I broke a helve Agathemer had no substitute ready, and, what was more, the fragment of the old helve was in so tight that he had to burn it out in the fire and then retemper and resharpen our one precious axe-head. His retempering and resharpening turned out all right, but he said his success was accidental and he might ruin the axe if he tried again. So he made two extra helves and had a dozen cornel-wood pegs ready to drive out the bit of broken handle next time I broke it; as I did, according to his laughing forecast.

The incessant labor of our days hardened both of us. Our muscles were like steel rods. We slept on our mattresses by that ash-covered fire as I had never slept at Villa Andivia or at my mansion in Rome. We ate enormously and relished every mouthful.

Riving lengths of logs with wedges and maul was a kind of work calling for no special skill; Agathemer taught me all he knew in a day or two. All winter we alternated this work with woodchopping, afterwards chopping the riven lengths into firewood lengths and then splitting these into firewood. Although we worked at riving and chopping and splitting every moment of daylight when we were not busy at something else, we never accumulated any comfortable store of firewood, so as to be able to rest even one day. We drank new milk by the quart, with both our meals; wine, abundantly as we were supplied with it and good as it proved to be, we drank sparingly, merely a draught at waking, one after each meal, and one at bedtime. What we took we took strong, mixing wine and water in equal proportions.

Both Agathemer and I preferred cows' milk and drank that only, as we gave cows' milk only to the sick woman. Both children preferred ewes' milk. As we had no hogs to feed

we were put to it what to do with our surplus milk. Agathemer made a sort of soft cheese, by putting sour curds in a bag and hanging it up to drain. We both liked this and so did the little girls. But we could not use much this way. Agathemer, always resourceful, fed the dog all the goat's milk he would lap up, and, after he had set to curdle what seemed enough, mixed the rest, while fresh and sweet, with water and gave this mixture to the cows to drink, saying it increased their yield of milk. As the winter wore on he fed similarly the best milkers among the ewes and goats.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XIV WINTER IN THE MOUNTAINS

Neither Agathemer nor I knew anything about bread-making. He tried, but merely wasted flour. And both of us hated the wearisome labor of grinding grain in either of the rough hand-mills which were in the store-house. He found a means of keeping us well fed, satisfied and looking forward to the next meal with pleasure. He screened a peck or so of barley, put it to soak in a crock, and then, when it was swelled, put it in a crock or flat-bottomed jar, with just enough water to cover it, and bedded this in the hot coals by the edge of the fire. There, under a tight lid, it stewed and swelled and steamed all day, unless he judged it done sooner. When it was cooked to his taste he mixed through it cheese, raisins, and several sorts of flavorings, also a little honey. The porridge-like product he baked, as it were, by turning a larger crock over the crock containing it. The result was always tasty and relishable.

I asked him why he used barley, not wheat, of which there was quite a supply. He said barley was supposed to be heating, and we certainly needed all the heating we could get.

The old smoked cheeses, of which an amazing number hung in the hut and store-houses, were, to me, very appetizing, used in this way, though too strongly flavored for me to eat any quantity of any sort as one would eat normal cheese. Agathemer said they had all been smoked too soon, while the cheese was yet soft, so that the smoke had penetrated all through the cheese. Certainly the outside of each cheese was mere soot to the depth of an inch, so that we had to throw it away. Even Hylactor would not eat it.

Soon after the first hard freeze we found, one morning, one of the goats with a leg broken. Agathemer, with me to help him, got her out into one of the buildings, out of sight or hearing of the other animals; and, there later, butchered her. We had, by this time, found butchering knives and kitchen knives, to the number of a score, but each hidden by itself, and in the oddest places, one under a sill of the cowshed, another under a wine-jar, several between the rafters and thatch, most buried in the thatch itself, as if they had been hidden on purpose. They were all rusty, but we soon had them bright and sharp. With some of these we butchered and cut up the goat. The offal we fed to Hylactor, not much at a time. Most of the rest of her we ate, a little at a time, as the frost kept the meat from spoiling.

The kidneys Agathemer used first. He washed them, soaked them, parboiled them, cut them into bits, fried the bits in olive oil, and then, when they were crisp, stirred some of

them through one of his crocks of cooked barley. The result was delicious. The kidneys sufficed for two or three crocks of barley. Then he did something similar with the liver with a result almost as appetizing.

We had some chops, broiled over the hot coals; also collops, spitted, with bits of fat bacon between. But neither of us cared much for goat's meat, and Agathemer's attempt at a broth made of the tougher meat was not a success. It had a repulsive smell and a more repulsive taste, though it seemed nourishing. He made only one pot of broth. After that we fed the coarser parts, little by little, to Hylactor.

This loss of one goat led Agathemer to do some thinking. There was a pretty large supply of hay, but not enough to keep in good milk all through the winter, until grass grew next spring, two cows, eight ewes and twenty goats. We talked the matter over. The ram and the he-goat were manifestly of choice breeding stock, probably carefully selected and cherished. We judged their owner would be angry if he did not find them on his return. So Agathemer considered which of the ewes gave the least milk and promised least as a breeder, and, after all the goat's meat was used up, we killed her. Sheep's-kidneys and sheep's-liver are better eating than goat's-kidneys and goat's-liver. We both agreed on that and we liked mutton chops and mutton cutlets. Hylactor got only the offal and the coarser bits, the rest Agathemer made into a relishable broth flavored with marjoram, bay-leaves and other herbs.

During the winter he killed six more goats and one more ewe, so that we fed, all winter, six ewes and twelve goats. For these the hay sufficed and not a little was left when we departed.

For ourselves, while we wasted nothing, we were lavish with the food stores. The bitter cold and our unremitting toil all day long, at a thousand other tasks and always at preparing fire-wood, contributed to keep us ravenous. We ate heartily twice a day, never taking anything between meals except all the milk we chose to drink, and I found ewes' milk and goats' milk, yet warm, or milked that morning, good to drink in cold weather. Often we mixed hot water with the goats' milk and drank the mixture while warm.

One intensely cold and brilliantly clear day, as I was riving a log, panting and glowing with the labor, yet with fingers numb and feet aching with the cold, I heard a yell from Agathemer. Axe in hand, my left hand making sure that my knife was loose in its sheath, where I wore it stuck in my belt, I raced to the store-house. There I found Agathemer alone, unhurt, standing by an olive-jar, staring into it.

"What is wrong?" I queried.

"Nothing wrong," he said, "but something amazing."

He fumbled in the jar, reaching his arm down into it as far as he could, his arm-pit tight down on the rim. After some straining he held up his hand, all dripping with dregs, and, between his thumb and forefinger, exhibited an unmistakable gold coin. How many there were in that jar we never knew; there were too many to count. We turned the jar over on its side, with some labor, and made sure that there were enough gold coins in it to weigh more than either I or Agathemer weighed and we were about normal-sized men, in every way.

We discussed this find a good deal. We agreed that the coins were of no use to us and could be of no use to us. As we meant to pass ourselves off for Sabine cattle-buyers until we were out of Umbria, as we meant to press on to Aquileia, as soon as the weather was warm enough, as we meant to pass ourselves off for runaway slaves, if we were arrested and questioned gold coins in our possession would have been most dangerous to us. We agitated the idea of sewing a few into the hems of our tunics and into the ends of our belts; but we came to the conclusion that any attempt to exchange a gold coin for silver would be very dangerous and much too risky a venture.

We also agreed that if the master of the place returned he must not suspect that we knew of his hoard. So we replaced the jar as it had stood, effaced all signs of its having been moved and refilled it with olives, taking them from another jar, which proved to contain olives only, all the way to the bottom.

This find led Agathemer to investigate every jar on the place, running a long rod of tough wood down into each as a sounder. In another jar of olives he found a similar hoard of silver denarii. Of these we took as many as were necessary to replenish the store of coins Chryseros had furnished us with. Even of silver we dared not carry too much. The hoard was so large that the handful of coins we took was unlikely ever to be missed.

The little girls, early in our stay, became entirely accustomed to us and utterly trustful of us. In the chests Agathemer found other tunics, warmer than those they had on when we came, which were suited to them. But there were no cloaks small enough for them to wear. With our precious scissors Agathemer cut in two the smallest warm cloak he could find and, with the needles and thread Chryseros had given us, he roughly hemmed the cut edge. The two awkwardly-shaped cloaks, thus made, the children wore till spring.

We could find no shoes for the children and they went barelegged and barefooted all the winter. They did not seem to mind it, except on the most bitterly cold days, when the wind howled about the hut, roaring through the pines and naked-boughed oaks, blowing

before it the snow in silver dust. Then they kept inside the hut all day. But, on sunny and windless days, they ran about barefoot in the snow and seemed entirely indifferent to the cold, though they always appeared glad to dry and warm their little pink toes at the fire, after they returned to the hut. Agathemer, more knowing than I, would not let them approach the fire until they had bathed their feet in a crock of water he kept standing ready inside the hut door and had partially dried them afterwards. He said that otherwise their feet would puff and swell and perhaps inflame. They seemed happy-hearted little beings and Secunda was bright. But Prima was very dull and less intelligent than her younger sister. We concluded that she was, while not anything like an idiot, certainly a very backward child, lacking the wit of a normal child of her age.

After the first snow fell we had no more trouble with violent outbreaks from the sick woman; or, at least, very little. Her next fit of raving came about ten days after the first snowfall and began in the daytime, when both Agathemer and I were in the hut. We forced her back into her bed and then Agathemer had an inspiration. He bade me hold her where she was and he took down his flageolet, from where it hung on a high peg on the partition, and began to play it.

The woman quieted at once and seemed to sink to sleep. After that her fits, which recurred at frequent intervals, took up little of our time, as upon each we had only to get her back into her bed and compose her by means of Agathemer's music.

It was well along towards spring, certainly far towards the end of the winter, when Agathemer made his most astonishing discovery. By that time the animals gave no more milk than sufficed for the five of us; there was no surplus to feed back to the best milkers. Also we had a little reserve of firewood and did not have to drive ourselves so unremittingly to escape death by freezing if our fuel gave out.

I was chopping wood in a leisurely way, and enjoying the exercise. The little girls were inside the hut at the moment, after playing about most of the morning. Agathemer came out of the store-house, glanced around, and beckoned to me: together we went inside. There he showed me where he, led by a very slight difference of color, had dug into the earth floor and come upon a small maple-wood chest, like a temple treasure-box. It was, outside, perhaps a foot wide and about as high, and not over a foot and a half long. He had forced it open with the hatchet and a heavy knife, like a Spartan wood-knife. The wood of the chest was so thick that the inside cavity was comparatively small. But it was big enough to have held, say, two quarts of wine. And it was almost full of jewels; opals, turquoises, topazes, amethysts, rubies, emeralds and sapphires.

Agathemer shut the store-house door and fastened it so the little girls could not open it if they should chance to try. Then he spread his cloak on the earth floor and dumped the

contents of the chest on it. Most of the gems were small, at least two score were very large, and there were many, of notable, though moderate, size. We could see them fairly well, though the store-house was dim, since, with the door shut, the only light was what came through chinks. We ran our fingers through the heap of jewels, picked up the largest and held them to the light and gained a general idea of the value of the hoard. We put them all back into the chest, shut it, and reburied it. It showed no marks of Agathemer's dexterous attempts at opening it, for the lid was held down only by a clasp outside, and by the swelling of the inside flange of wood against the overlapping rim of the lid.

We went out to the woodpile and I resumed my chopping, while Agathemer set to riving logs with the wedges and maul. We had always kept the little girls away from the woodpile and so were sure of being alone. Also we talked Greek as an extra precaution.

Agathemer, resting between assaults on a very big log, said:

"I am of the same opinion I have held since we found the gold. This place belongs to some Umbrian farmer who is in partnership with a bandit chief or the leader of a gang of footpads. Just as the King of the Highwaymen is said to have a brother in Rome, important among the Imperial spies, so most outlaws have some anchor somewhere with associates apparently honest and respectable. The owner of this place may be brother of a brigand, or related to one in some other way or merely a trusted friend. At any rate I am of the opinion that this fastness is used as a repository for robbers' loot. Everything points to it. The gems and the coins make it certain, to my thinking, but even if we had found none of these it is pretty plain from everything else. There is no sign that there ever was a pig anywhere about here: yet the store of fine old bacon surpasses anything any mere farm ever kept on hand; there is not a square yard of ground hereabouts that ever has been plowed, spaded or hoed: yet the place is crammed with all sorts of farm produce. Manifestly it was all brought here, where there are no pigeons to reveal the place by their flight above it, nor any cock to call attention to it by his crowing. This is not a farm, it is a treasure-house, lavishly provided with everything portable.

"The absence of the man and the flight of the slaves puzzles me. As for the slaves, I can form no conjecture. But I am inclined to think it possible that the man was betrayed somehow to the authorities and is in prison or has been executed. We must assume, however, that he is alive and will return and must comport ourselves accordingly.

"Now I tell you what I mean to do. In such a hoard of gems a few of medium size could never be missed, even if missed, their abstraction could never be proved. I'm going to select the best of the medium-sized emeralds, topazes, rubies and sapphires; enough to fill the leather amulet-bags Chryseros gave us. All slaves wear amulet-bags, if they can

get them; ours are old, worn and soiled and will make unsurpassable hiding places for as many gems as they will hold. I'll take out the amulets and sew them into the hems of our tunics, at the corners. I'll fill the bags as full of gems as is possible without making them look unusually plump. Then, if we reach Aquileia, we shall have a source of cash enough to last us years; for I can sell the jewels one at a time at high prices."

"Are you sure that the stones are worth all that care?" I cavilled. "May you not be mistaken as to their value or even as to their genuineness?"

"Not I," Agathemer bragged. "I am one of the foremost gem experts alive. Your uncle, as you know, held it a wicked waste of money for a sickly bachelor to buy gems; but he was a natural-born gem fancier. He knew every famous jewel in Rome: every one of the Imperial regalia, every one ever worn by anyone at any festival or entertainment, every one in every fancier's collection of jewels. From him I learned all I know: I myself possess the faculties to profit by my training. I know more of gems than most, I tell you!"

I agreed, and, during the next few days, he selected the stones he judged most valuable, enough to fill the hollow of one of my hands and as much for him, and sewed the two batches up in our emptied amulet-bags. The amulets, which were two Egyptian scarabs and two Babylonian seals, very crude in workmanship and of the meanest glazed pottery, he sewed into the corners of our tunics.

Soon after this came the first thaw of the spring; a mild sunny day cleared every bough of every tree of the last vestiges of clinging snow or ice. Then we had two days of warm rain, sometimes a drizzle, sometimes a downpour. Then, on the fourth day, the sky was clear again and the sunshine strong.

As usual after my morning duties, I went in to take a look at our insensible hostess. She lay, as she had mostly lain all winter, breathing almost imperceptibly, her eyes closed. As I bent over her, her eyes opened.

She sat up, wide-eyed, startled, the picture of amazement and it came over me that she was no peasant woman, but a lady.

"Who are you?" she demanded, supporting herself on one elbow. "I do not know you; what are you doing here?"

"I have been helping to nurse you," I said. "You have been ill a long time and have needed much care. Lie down; you will hinder your recovery if you exert yourself too soon."

She lay back, but propped herself up on her pillows, and in no weak voice insisted on knowing who I was.

At that instant Agathemer entered. He, far more diplomatic than I, took charge of the situation. The woman, instead of losing consciousness again at once, as I expected, appeared possessed of much more strength than anyone would have anticipated and asked searching questions.

Agathemer, tactfully but without any attempt at beating about the bush, told her the whole truth, as to her illness, our finding her alone with the two children, our care of her, and the length of our stay. He said afterwards that he hoped the shock would cure her.

"Am I to understand you to say," she asked, "that I have been in this bed since the middle of the autumn and that it is now almost spring?"

"Just that," said Agathemer simply.

"And that you two men have been, practically, in possession of this entire place all that time?"

"That is true also," I said.

Agathemer and I looked at each other. We had used our one pair of scissors mutually and our hair and beards were not shaggy or bushy. But we were a rough, rather fierce-looking, pair.

"This," she said, "is terrible, terrible! Where are my daughters?"

"Playing about out in the sunshine," I said. "Plump and well-fed, and healthy and cheerful."

"This," she repeated, "is terrible, terrible! May I not see them, may I not speak to them, will you not bring them to me?"

"Indeed we will," I said and motioned to Agathemer. While he was gone the woman and I regarded each other without speaking. When Agathemer returned with the children I said:

"We will leave you to talk to your daughters alone. When you wish us to return send one of the children for us."

The joy of the two at the sight of their mother, sensible and able to recognize them, was pathetic. Sobbing and laughing, they flung themselves on the bed and embraced her, kissing her and she kissing each.

We went out and set to chopping and riving wood.

Before very long Secunda came out and said her mother wanted to speak to me. Leaving Agathemer plying his maul I went in.

The woman was now well propped up against a heap of pillows. She told the children to run off and play till she sent for them. Then she motioned me to seat myself on the chest. I did so.

She regarded me fixedly, as she had while Agathemer had gone for the children. When she spoke she asked:

"What god do you worship?"

I was amazed at this unusual and unexpected question and hesitated a moment before I answered:

"Mercury, chiefly. Of course, Jupiter and Juno; Dionysius, Apollo, Minerva. But most of all Mercury."
She sighed.

"I had expected a very different answer," she said. "But, whatever god or gods you worship, you are a good man and your servant is a good man. I am amazed. My children were truthful till I fell ill. I am sure they could not have changed in one winter. In any case Secunda's precocity and Prima's vacuity seem equally incapable of any deception. What they tell me is all but incredible, yet I believe it. You two men have acted to me and mine as if you had been my blood kin. If you two had been my own brothers you could have done no more for us. I shall always be grateful. What are your names?"

Agathemer and I had agreed to use the names Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper. These names, common enough in Sabinum, we, in fact, had given at the farms where Agathemer's flageolet-playing won us entertainment in the autumn. I gave them now. I added:

"It seems best to me that you should not ask either whence we came or whither we are bound."

"I understand," she said.

"And now," said I, "since you have our names, tell us how we should address the mother of Prima and Secunda."

"My name," she said, "is Nona. [Footnote: Ninth.] My mother had a larger family than I am ever likely to be blest with."

Nona recovered with marvellous rapidity. The weather continued fair and warm, with no strong winds, only steady, gentle breezes. This aided her, as it dried out the hut. She slept well at night, she said, and heavily in the afternoons. When awake she ate heartily and was almost alert. She questioned me again and again as to the condition in which we had found the place. I told her the exact truth, except as to finding the hoards of coins and jewels, to the smallest detail. I also told her of our stewardship and of our having killed and eaten a brace of ewes and eight goats. She approved.

I asked her about the children's tale of the slaves running away.

She sighed.

"I should have trusted any one of the seven," she said. "I believed that any one of them would have been faithful. I suppose almost all slaves are alike, after all. Hermes died about midsummer. He was the oldest of them and the best. I suppose that, in past winters, he had kept the others to their duty. But then, I was never ill before. Without Hermes to lead them, without me to order them, I suppose what they did was natural."

I told her of the great cold and abundant snow of the winter. She questioned me and said:

"Evidently you have had more cold and snow in one winter than I have had in ten."

On the third day after her revival she was able to get out of bed and, leaning heavily on me, to reach the door of the hut. There she sat basking in the sun, Secunda on one side of her, Prima on the other, Hylactor at her feet.

Hylactor had proved himself a perfect watchdog that winter. We had never allowed him to sleep in the hut, as he would have done if permitted, and as he tried to do at first. Agathemer had fashioned him a tiny shelter and into it he crawled nightly. Out of it,

also, he dashed, if any sound or scent roused him. Tracks of wolves were frequent in the snow out in the forest, and not a few approached our clearing. But we lost not one sheep or goat to any wolf. Hylactor frightened off most and killed three, a medium-sized female and two full-grown young males, at the acme of their fighting powers. We rated Hylactor a paragon among dogs.

The warm weather held on, though unseasonable so early in the year. Nona recovered so rapidly that she was able to visit each of the outbuildings. Just when she was well enough to walk alone and firmly came a sharp spell of cold, as unseasonable as had been the heat. It began about noon, one clear day, with a high wind. By sunset everything was frozen.

Nona said:

"You two have had more than your share of sleeping on the earth floor by the fire. My bed will hold me and my girls, for a few nights. You two take their bed. It will be cold on the floor tonight."

That night, therefore, Agathemer and I enjoyed a sound night's sleep in a deep, soft bed. It was our first night in a Gallic bed, and we liked it. Since our crawl through the drain we had slept abed but four times, at farms in the Umbrian mountains. This was best of all. And we had a succession of nights of it, for the cold held on and, even when it abated, Nona insisted on our continuing to sleep so.

During the cold she mixed a batch of bread, and Agathemer baked it. She had praised his cookery, especially his savory messes of steamed barley, flavored with cheese, raisins and what not. But when the cold snap came after the thaws she suggested that we grind some wheat and she make bread. We acceded with alacrity. The bread tasted unbelievably good.

As soon as the weather was again warm it was plain that spring was coming in earnest. Nona stood out of doors after sunset, went out again after dark, staring up at the sky.

Next morning, while the children were at play, she said to me:

"Felix, you and Asper must leave this place at once and be on your way. My husband will return soon. He may return any day now. He is a terrible man. He will come with too many men for you to resist and he will not ask any questions until after he has killed you both. I know him. If I could be sure of telling him before he saw you what manner of men you are and how deeply I am in your debt he would repay you lavishly, for he is

liberal and generous. But, being what he is, if he finds you here, you will be dead before I can explain. You must go. Prepare to set off at dawn tomorrow."

I told Agathemer and he agreed with me that we had best do as Nona said. She was, as she averred, well enough to care for herself and the children. But we lingered next day. By dusk she was frantic, begging, imploring us to depart at dawn. I feared a recurrence of her illness and gave her my promise.

We set off, actually, not at dawn, but about an hour after sunrise, the broad brims of our travelling hats flapping in the wind, our cloaks close about us, our wallets slung over our shoulders, our staffs in our hands. At the hut door Nona, Prima and Secunda bade us farewell, Nona thanking and blessing us. Hylactor was for following us: we had to order him back, for he paid more attention to us than to Nona.

With a last backward glance at the edge of the clearing we plunged into the forest by the track leading northward.

We had not gone a hundred paces when I thought I heard a scream and stopped. Agathemer declared he had heard nothing. But, listening, we did hear twigs snapping and Hylactor bounded into sight. He did not fawn on us, but seized my cloak in his teeth and tugged, growling and snarling.

"That dog," said Agathemer, "is asking for help. He knows what is too much for him to fight."

We threw off our shoes, wallets and cloaks, tucked up our tunics and, staffs in one hand and sheathless knives in the other, barefoot, raced back along the track after the guiding dog.

From that entrance of the clearing the outbuildings hid the hut from us. When our rush brought us in sight of the hut door we were not six paces from it and just in time to see Hylactor spring on and bear to the earth a man who stood before it. Leaving him to Hylactor we dashed inside, urged by indubitable shrieks.

In the dim interior we made out each child struggling with a man and Nona with two. Before they could turn our knives had slaughtered the children's assailants. One of the survivors Agathemer cracked over the head with his staff. I stabbed the other. Whereupon Agathemer cut the throat of the man he had downed, and dashing outside, finished the man Hylactor was worrying. Quicker than it takes to tell it the five were dead.

Nona had fainted, as we rescued her. But Agathemer revived her with a dash of cold water in her face and some strong wine poured between her lips. We laid her on her bed and told the children to watch her. Then we dragged out the corpses, laid them in a row and considered them. All five were pattern ruffians; black-haired, burly, brutal and fierce. We had had amazing luck to dispose of them so easily. Five lucky flukes, Agathemer called it, and we without a scratch.

One by one we picked them up and carried them off, down the slope, to a soft bit of soil among some beeches. There we laid them in a row. On them we found a few silver coins, five daggers, five knives, five amulet-bags, nothing else. Their tunics and cloaks were old and of poor material.

Back to the hut we went and found Nona revived and at the door.

"Begone!" she said. "Flee! Hasten! That man was my husband's bitterest enemy. He was intent on revenge. But he could never have found this place save by tracking my husband and conjecturing his destination. My husband must have camped last night less than a day's journey from here. He will be here today, he may be here any moment. Save yourselves. Begone!"

Agathemer and I looked at each other.

"We shall not set off," I said, "until we have buried the five corpses. I'm not going to be haunted on my way and perhaps for life by any such spooks as the ghosts of those five ruffians. We shall make sure that they are safely buried."

Agathemer agreed with me and we set about the task. During the winter we had found mattocks, pickaxes, hoes, spades and shovels hid in the most unlikely places, each by itself, and had hafted them; with these we dug a big pit and in it laid the five corpses, and buried them too deep for any wolf, badger or other creature to be at all likely to smell them and dig them out or dig down to them.

When the men were buried it was past noon. We went back to the hut, drank a second draught of the strongest and sweetest wine and drank it unmixed, as we had drunk our first before we set about carrying the corpses into the forest. Nona renewed her adjurations to begone.

But neither I nor Agathemer would listen to her. I said I was far too tired to travel until after a night's sleep and that after having saved her and her daughters, it was no more than fair that she should stand watch over us while we slept all the afternoon: she could

easily watch at the hut door and explain matters to her terrible husband if he came and were as terrible as she averred.

We retrieved our wallets, cloaks and shoes, threw them down in a corner of the hut, ate some bread with plenty of milk to wash it down, and went to sleep in the children's bed, as we had slept the night before. We woke before sunset, did what was needful about the place, ate a hearty dinner of bread, bacon, olives, raisins and wine and at once went to bed for the night. After dark Nona ceased adjuring us to begone; she said that, if her husband came, she would hear him at the hut door and make him aware of the facts in time to prevent any trouble. We slept till sunrise. Then Nona declared that she and the children could milk the animals. We agreed with her, for they had little milk by then. We ate a hearty breakfast and set off.

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CHAPTER XV THE HUNT

That day we met no one and made a long march north-westwards along the flank of the mountain, camping at dusk by a spring. There we rehearsed our rescue of Nona and marvelled at the ease with which we had disposed of five burly ruffians. Agathemer agreed with me that it had been mostly the effect of complete surprise. But he took a good deal of the credit to himself. He reminded me how he had practiced me, ever since we began our flight, at the art of fighting with knives, at knife attack in general. In particular he had drilled me, as well as he could without a corpse or dummy to practice on, at the favorite stroke of professional murderers, the stab under the left shoulder-blade, the point of the knife or dagger directed a little upward so as to reach the heart. By this stroke I had killed both my victims, and he one of his. I acknowledged his claims, but was inclined to thank the gods for special aid and favor. We discussed that amazingly lucky fight until too sleepy to talk any more.

Next day we met some charcoal burners, who were both friendly and unsuspecting and who gave us intelligible directions for making our way towards Sarsina. The second night we again camped in the woods; the third we spent at a farmhouse, thanks to Agathemer's flageolet.

The farmer, whose name was Caesus, told a grewsome tale of the horrors of the plague and of the death of almost all his slaves. He was gloomy about his future, as he, his two sons, and their surviving slave were too few to work his farm. He seemed to regard us as fugitives from justice and as men whom it was his duty to help and protect. As the season was too early for comfortable travelling along byways or for safety from suspicion along highways, and as he welcomed us, we spent a month with him, well fed, well lodged and rather enjoying the hard farm work and the outdoor life, though we spent also much time under-cover, working at what could be done under shelter during heavy rains.

After he had come to feel at ease with us, our host, one day when we three were alone, asked:

"Are you some of the King of the Highwaymen's men?"

On our disclaiming any connection with the King of the Highwaymen, or any knowledge of such a character, he sighed and said:

"Oh, well! Of course, if you were, you would deny it, anyhow. You may be or you may not be. Anyhow, if you are, tell him I treated you well and shall always do my best for any man I take for one of his men.

"You don't look like his kind nor act like any I ever was sure of, but he has all sorts. I thought it best to make sure. It is best to stand well with him. He passes somewhere near here every spring or early summer on his way north and again in the autumn on his way south."

We left this bourne only on the solstice, the tenth day before the Kalends of July, and trudged comfortably to Sarsina, where we put up at the inn, frequented by foot-farers like us. So also at Caesena and Faventia. There we agreed that we had had enough of the highway, as we might encounter some Imperial spies of the regular secret service department, and not a few of these spies might know me by sight in any disguise. So we struck off due north through the almost level open country, intending to keep on northward until we came to the Spina and to follow that to the Po. As Agathemer said, if we could not find ferrymen by day we could steal a skiff by night.

Not far north of Faventia, after an easy-going day's march under a mild spring sky, we came, just before sunset, to a forest of considerable extent. As we could not conjecture whether to turn east or west, we camped at its edge and slept soundly, comfortable in our cloaks, for the night was warm and still.

Next morning the weather was so charming that we were tempted to plunge into the forest and cross it as nearly due north as we could guide ourselves by the sun. Since we reached the edge of the forest we had seen no human-being near enough for us to ask in which direction we had best try to go round it. We plunged into it and in it we wasted the entire day.

The country is very flat between Faventia and the Spina. I do not believe that in any part of that forest the surface of the soil was four yards higher than in any other part. And it was marshy, all quagmires and sloughs, with narrow, sinuous ribbons, as it were, of fairly dry land between them. We were hopelessly involved among its morasses before we realized our plight and, after we did realize it, we seemed to make little progress. We agreed that it would be folly to try to regain our camp: we held to our purpose and tried to advance northwards. But we doubled right and left, had to retrace our steps often and could form no idea how far we had penetrated.

There was an astonishing abundance of game in that forest: hares everywhere; does with fawns, young does, and not a few stags; wild boars, which fled, grunting, out of their

wallows as we approached; foxes of which we three times glimpsed one at a distance; and we came on indubitable wolf tracks. We had plenty of food and ate some at noon, for we were tired. Then we spent the day threading the mazes of that swampy forest. We were careful not to get bogged and we kept our tunics and cloaks dry, though we were mired to the knees. But our very care delayed us. The day was breezy and mild but not really warm, so that we did not suffer from the heat. But by nightfall we were exhausted and had no idea how far we had advanced northward. Just at dusk we came to reasonably firm going and walked due north about a furlong. There, as the twilight deepened, we encountered another stretch of ooze. We retreated from it a dozen paces and camped under some swamp-maples on comfortably dry ground. We ate about half of our food, bread, olives, and dried figs; and while eating dried and warmed our feet and shanks at a generous fire of fallen boughs, which Agathemer, who was clever with flint and steel, had made quickly. When our feet felt as if they really belonged to us, we wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and slept soundly.

We slept, indeed, so soundly, that it was broad day when, we waked. And we waked to hear the wood ringing with the barking and baying of dogs and with the cries of hunters and beaters. Instantly we realized that we were in danger. For a hunt of such size as was approaching us must have been gotten up by a coterie of wealthy land-owners; and such magnates, if they caught sight of us, would at once suspect us of being runaway slaves. It had been easy enough to pass ourselves off for formerly cattle-buyers in the Umbrian Mountains. But, habited as we were, camped in the depths of a thick, swampy forest, we were sure to be suspected of being runaway slaves by anyone who encountered us; and such gentry as organize big hunts with swarms of beaters are always prone to suspect any footfarers of being runaway slaves.

We hastily girded ourselves for flight, meanwhile reminding each other of the story we had planned to tell if caught.

At first we seemed to have luck. We turned westwards away from the beaters and found and passed the upper end of the morass which had stopped us the night before. From there the going was good, through open underbrush, beneath big beeches and chestnuts, over firm and gently rolling ground. Stopping and listening we tried to judge by the sounds the location of the line of beaters. We seemed to have a chance of getting beyond its western end. We set off again; just as we started on nine deer dashed past us, a big stag, two young stags and six does.

Then we did run, for we knew it was our last chance and, indeed, but little further, a young wolf raced down a ferny glade, vanishing into some alders on the further side of the glade. I nearly trod on a fleeing hare. The beaters could not be far off.

Yet, for a bit, we seemed to be gaining on them, although we were quartering their front on a long slant. The third time we stopped to pant and listen we thought that our next dash would carry us where we might crouch in the first thicket and let their line sweep past us.

But, some fifty yards or so beyond, when we came to the dancing red feathers on the cord and thought we would be safe in a few breaths, there rose at us, from behind the feathered cord, three stocky men, armed with broad-bladed hunting-spears, who yelled at us:

"Halt! Stand! Surrender!"

We recoiled from them, amazed, threw away our wallets, threw off our cloaks, and bolted, incredulous; and as we ran, we heard them yelling:

"Here! Here! Here they are! We see them! This way, all of you! We've got them! Here they are!"

No bogs, no sloughs turned us or delayed us. The going was good, over firm footing, through light underwoods, among wide-set, big trees. For our lives we ran. There seemed a very slender chance of our crossing the whole length of the line of beaters and escaping on the other side, but that slender chance seemed our only chance. We ran fit to burst our hearts.

And the hunt was plainly converging on us. The noises of the beaters drew nearer. We seemed in a swarm of fleeing hares: more deer and more deer passed us, this time, I thought, does with young fawns. We caught a glimpse of another wolf, of two foxes. And, in a moist hollow, we barely avoided a nasty rush of eight panic-stricken, grunting wild swine.

We did run across the entire line of beaters, but little good it did us. Again we saw before us the feathered cord, the scarlet plumes dancing in the sun. At it we ran, sure of safety if we passed it unseen and penetrated even ten yards beyond it into the underbrush. But we were again disappointed.

This time only two huntsmen rose at us, but they, too, flourished hunting spears with gleaming points, as big as spades. They too yelled at us and yelled to their fellows:

"Halt! You are caught! Hands up! Give yourselves up!"

And:

"There they go! Both of them! Come on! Here they are!"

Off we went again, slanting back across the approaching line of dogs and beaters, now closer together as they drew on towards the nets, and already appallingly close to us. Again we crossed the whole line, now much shorter. But this time we ran, not against part of the long stretch of feathered cord, but against the outer yard-high net. Of course this was well guarded and again we were yelled at and turned back.

Doubling back, now steaming, panting, gasping, with knees trembling under us, we reached the net on the other side.

Turned again, we found the beaters so near us and so close together, that we ran away from them rather than across their line. We ran, in fact, in a sort of mob of hares, foxes, boars, deer and even wolves, for some of each were in sight every moment.

So running we came where we could see the line of nets, now of six-foot, heavy-meshed nets, on either side of us. We made a last, desperate dash at one of the nets, I hoping to leap it or vault it or clamber over it and escape, after all. But six keepers, all with broad-bladed hunting spears, rose at us beyond it, rose with triumphant yells:

"We've got you now! We've got you now!"

From them we shied off and ran, half staggering with exhaustion and despair, between the converging lines of nets, ran in a veritable press of terrified game of all sorts, ran madly, since we heard now, not the barking and whine of dogs straining at their leashes, but the exultant yelping, barking and baying of great packs of dogs unleashed behind their game.

Of course, although no single dog, however infuriated, would ever attack me in daylight, when it could see my face, yet I could do nothing whatever to protect myself, and far less Agathemer, against the massed onset of more than a hundred maddened hunting dogs, each bigger than a full-grown wolf.

So running, staggering, stumbling, at the end of our strength, we found ourselves running into the battue-pocket at the meeting of the two long converging lines of nets. Anything would be better than that. We tried to double back and were met by a dozen big dogs, some Gallic dogs of the breed of Tolosa, spotted black and white, others mouse-colored Molossians. To escape them we dodged apart, each ran for a tree, each jumped, each caught the lowest limb of a thick-foliaged maple, the two not much over five yards apart. So thick were their leaves that I could hardly make out Agathemer in

his tree. The two maples were close to the beginning of the pocket net. From my perch I could see plainly how cunningly the pocket had been set.

It was of strong, close-meshed nets fully three yards high stretched on sturdy forked stakes and well guyed back outside to pegs like tent-pegs. These pocketing nets were set along the tops of the two banks of a gully about twenty yards wide, sloping sharply downward from its top near our trees and with sides three or four yards high and steep. Once in this gully, between the pocketing nets along the upper edge of its sides, no boar could scramble out, the lower meshes of the pocketing nets were too fine for any hare to squeeze through; no doe, no stag even, could leap such nets at the top of such banks.

I could just spy a part of the heaviest net across the gully at the end of the pocket. It seemed a large meshed net of rope thicker than my knee, with the large meshes filled in with smaller meshes of rope the size of my wrist.

Hardly was I safe in the crotch of my tree when the last of the game swept by below us, the dogs hot behind them, up came the press of beaters, and, from each side, in rushed the hunters, a score of handsome nobles and gentry, habited in green tunics, wearing small, green, round-crowned, narrow-brimmed hunting hats and green boots up to just below their knees. Each carried a heavy shafted hunting spear, tipped with a huge triangular gleaming head, pointed like a needle, edged like a razor, broad as a spade at its flare.

Even in my terror and exhaustion I could not but feel a certain pleasure in the beauty of the scene, a sort of thrill at its strangeness. I had participated in such hunts in Bruttium and Sabinum, but never as hunted game.

The sun was not yet half way up the heavens, the dew had not yet dried from the leaves, owing to the very late spring the freshness of springtime had not yet passed into the fullness of early summer. Through the tender green of the young leafage, starry with drops of moisture, the sunshine shot long shafts of golden light. Under the beautiful canopy of blue sky and golden green foliage was the amazing turmoil of the hunt.

More than a hundred large animals, pigs, fawns, sows, does, boars and stags had fled before the beaters and were now jammed pellmell in the gully, for the end-net held. There they frantically jostled each other and the half dozen wolves caught among them which, indeed, snapped, slashed and tore at everything within reach, but, cowed themselves, had no effect whatever on the maddened victims which all but trod them under and actually trampled on foxes and on the swarm of squeaking, helpless hares.

Upon this mass of terrified flesh the two hundred dogs flung themselves, through the nets the huntsmen stabbed at the nearest victims, behind the dogs the shouting hunters advanced to spear their game, the battue was on and I watched it till the last animal was flat. The few which, frenzied, doubled back through the dogs and hunters were met and killed by the beaters. Not one escaped.

As the battue ended up came the rush of beaters and our trees were soon surrounded by a crowd of eager, exultant, infuriated beaters and huntsmen.

Up the trees young beaters swarmed and we were plucked down, thumped, whacked, punched, kicked and manacled, our tunics torn off, ourselves mishandled till we streamed blood, all amid abuse, threats, epithets, execrations and curses.

We stood, half fainting, utterly dazed, supported by the two or three captors who held each of us, but for whose clutches we should have collapsed on the earth.

We expected to be torn limb from limb, yet could not conjecture why we were the objects of such infuriated animosity. A beater clutching either elbow, a hand clutching my neck from behind, my knees knocking together, naked, bruised, bloody, gasping, fainting, I, like Agathemer, was haled a few paces to one corner of the pocket net. There we were held till the gentlemen came up out of the gully.

Up they came, a score of handsome young fellows, mostly each with his hat in his hand and mopping his forehead.

"Why!" the foremost of them cried. "These are not the men! These are not the men at all! They are not in the least like them!"

"Not in the least like Lupercus and Rufinus, certainly," another added.

"What a pack of asses you are!" cried a third, "to mishandle two strangers. Couldn't you look at them before you mauled them?"

"We all took them for Rufinus and Lupercus," the head huntsman rejoined. "Certainly they are desperate characters and runaways. Look at their backs."

They turned us round, to display the marks of scourging still plain on us both.

"They've both been branded," said a gentleman's voice.

"Pooh!" cried another, "that proves nothing. They may have been scourged and branded by former masters, and manumitted since. I'll have no stranger ill-treated on my land until he has had a chance to explain himself."

While he was speaking my guards turned me round again and took their hands off me.

Our champion was a tall, powerful, plump and florid young man, with very curly golden hair, very light blue eyes, and the merest trace of downy, curly yellow beard. He was very handsome, with small delicate nose and mouth, a round chin and the most beautiful ears I ever saw on any man. He wore senators' boots and a tunic of pure silk, dyed a very brilliant green and embroidered all over with a flowering vine in a darker, glossier green.

"What are your names?" asked the elder man who had noticed our brand- marks. He was swarthy and probably over thirty.

I gave him the name of Felix and Agathemer that of Asper, as we had agreed, neither of us thinking it advisable to claim to be free Romans by prefixing, "Sabinus" and "Bruttius."

"Shut up, Marcus," our champion ordered, "can't you see that these poor fellows are in no condition to answer any questions? We'll interrogate them after they have bathed, eaten and slept."

"Here, Trogus," he called to one of the chief-huntsman's assistants, "take charge of these two fellows. Treat them well; if they report any incivility or omission on your part I'll make you regret it. When they are bathed and fed, let them sleep all they want to.

"And, here, Umbro" (this to the head-huntsman), "see that their effects are found and restored to them."

He turned to us.

"Did you have wallets?" he asked.

We nodded, too shaken to speak.

"Umbro," he said, "scour the wood. Have their shoes, their cloaks and especially their wallets found and brought to me. And make sure that nothing is taken from those wallets, that they are handed to their owners as they were found. If they find anything missing, I'll make you and your men smart. Be prompt! Be lively. Get those wallets and cloaks and shoes."

While he gave these orders, some beaters brought us our torn tunics; which, even so, were better than no clothing at all. We put them on.

Then we were led off to the edge of a forest, bestowed in a light Gallic gig, drawn by one tall roan mule only, and in it, the driver sitting at our feet, sideways, on one shaft, his legs hanging down, we were driven off through a beautiful gently rolling country, clothed with the superabundant crops, vines and orchards of the lower Po Valley, all bathed in brilliant spring sunshine, to a magnificent villa, most opulently provided with white-walled, neat outbuildings, all roofed with red tiles. In one of these, apparently the house of the farm-overseer, we were bathed, clothed with fresh tunics, far better than our own, lavishly fed and led to rest in tiny white-washed rooms, very plain, but clean and airy, where we went to sleep on corded cots provided with very thin grass- stuffed mattresses.

When we woke each found his wallet beside his cot, set on his neatly folded cloak; with our old worn shoes, well cleaned, on the floor by the folded cloaks.

Later we were led before our host and champion, who turned out to be Tarrutenus Spinellus; in no wise, it seemed, affected, by the downfall of his great kinsman. He questioned us and Agathemer told the story we had agreed on: that we had been slaves of Numerius Veditius of Aquileia, who had been kind to both of us and had made him overseer and me accountant of his vegetable farms on the sandy islets offshore along the coast of the Adriatic by Aquileia. There we had lived contentedly till we had been captured by raiding Liburnian pirates from the Dalmatian islands. They had sold us at Ancona, where we had been horribly mistreated by a cruel and savage master, who had branded and scourged us for imaginary delinquencies.

From him we had run away, intent on making our way back to Aquileia and to our rightful owner.

"This all sounds plausible," said Tarrutenus, "and I believe you, and it falls out well. For my cousin, Cornelius Vindex, will leave tomorrow or next day for Aquileia and you can travel in his company all the way."

We were well fed and lodged while at Villa Spinella. While there we learned that Lupercus and Rufinus, the two escaped malefactors for whom we had been mistaken by the huntsmen and beaters, had been runaway slaves, long uncatchable and lurking in swamps and forests, who had lately, tried to rob at night the store-house of a farmstead: and who, when the farmer rushed out to defend his property, had murdered him and even thereafter, in mere wantonness, had also murdered two of his slaves, his wife and a

young daughter. This horrible crime had roused the whole countryside to hunt them down and the great battue in which we had been involved had been organized at a time of the year most unusual and ruinous to the increase of deer-herds, precisely in order to snare the outlaws along with the game. They had not been caught and we had.

After two nights' good sleep, and a day's rest, with excellent and abundant meals, we set off at dawn in Cornelius' convoy, our precious amulet-bags untouched; our wallets just as we had flung them down in the forest, not a coin missing; and we were clothed in new good tunics, our bruises pretty well healed up or healing nicely, ourselves well content with our escape, but meditating a second escape, this time from, Cornelius.

For we had no stomach for the road to Aquileia, if in such company that we must present ourselves before Vedius as claiming to be slaves of his.

We escaped easily enough, just after crossing the Po, by sneaking off in the darkness from a villa where Cornelius, stopped overnight with a friend. Without any difficulty we recrossed the Po, not far below Hostilia, and from there made for Parma.

For we agreed that, after our story to Tarrutenus, with Cornelius Vindex in Aquileia, Aquileia would be no fit bourne for us. So we decided, after all, to risk the highway from Parma to Dertona and from there make our way across the Ligurian Mountains to Vada Sabatia and from there along the highway to Marseilles, where we should be able to hide in the slums among the mixture of all races in that lively city; and where Agathemer was sure he could turn gems into cash without danger or suspicion.

All, went well with us till we reached Placentia. There we put up at an inn. As we were leaving the town next morning, when we were about half way from the inn to the Clastidian Gate, Agathemer gripped my arm and motioned me up a side street. We walked with every indication of leisurely indifference until we had taken several turns and were alone in a narrow street. Then he told me that we had barely missed coming face to face with Gratillus himself.

This barely missed encounter with one of the most dreaded of the Emperor's spies, a man who knew me perfectly and who had always disliked me, so terrified both of us that we left Placentia by the Nuran Gate and made our way southwestward into the Apennines.

Once in the mountains we avoided every good road we saw and kept to bad byways, until we were completely lost.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XVI THE CAVE

The late spring or early summer weather was hot and clear. We had been pressing on feverishly and were heated, tired and sleepy, when, while following a faint track through dense woods, we took a wrong turn and soon found that we had utterly lost our way. The sunlight was intensely brilliant and the windless air sweltering. Stumbling over rocks and through bushes was exhausting. We came upon a little spring and quenched our thirst. Standing by it and staring about we noticed what looked like an opening in an inconspicuous vine-clad cliff. It was, in fact, the entrance to a spacious and, apparently, extensive cave.

The outer opening was about the size of an ordinary door. Though it was well masked by beeches above and cornel bushes below, such was the position of the sun and so intense was the flood of light it poured down from the cloudless sky, that the inside of the cave, for some little distance, was faintly discernible in the glimmer which penetrated there. After our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness we could make out fairly well the shape and proportions of the first considerable grotto.

From the outer opening a passage about a yard wide and two yards high extended straight into the cliff for about four yards. There it bent sharply to the right in an elbow. This offset extended three or four yards and then bent to the left in a similar elbow, opening into a cavern more than fifteen yards wide, twice as long or longer, and with a roof of dim white pendants like alabaster, no part of which was less than five yards from the conveniently level, rather damp floor, while some parts of it were lofty.

The two elbows in the entrance passage made it impossible to see into this cavern from anywhere out in the woods, and impossible to see out from anywhere inside it. Yet, as I said, so brilliant was the sunlight and so favorable the position, of the sun at the moment of our entrance that, after the outer dazzle had faded from inside our eyes, we could make out the form and size of this rocky hall.

To the right of the opening where the outer passage expanded, around a jutting shoulder of rock, we found a recess about three yards across and nearly as deep, in which we felt and smelt wood-ashes and charred, half- burnt wood. We groped among the damp charcoal, convincing ourselves that many good-sized fires had been made there, but none recently. We stood back and regarded this recess, which was so placed that no gleam from any fire, however large, kindled in it, could ever show outside the cave.

Investigating the recess yet again Agathemer looked up and pointed. Above me, I saw sky. The recess was a natural fire-place with a natural chimney from it, opening at a considerable height above.

To the right of the fire-place recess, round another smaller shoulder of rock, was a perfectly vertical wall of smooth stone terminating just above our reach at an opening three yards wide or more. The top of the wall of rock at the bottom of the opening was almost as straight as a door-sill.

At first we could descry in the walls of the cavern no other openings than the entrance, the chimney and this opening above our reach, unless one boosted the other up. From under it we went all round the cave past the fire-place and the entrance. The floor was all damp or moist, no place fit for us to lie down to sleep and we felt along the wall opposite the fire-place, where the light was too dim to see at all. After feeling for some yards we emerged or came round into a less dusky space, where we could see to some extent and so on along the back wall of the cave opposite the entrance, later groping along the wall, when the light failed.

Some forty to forty-five yards from the entrance, at the far end of this extensive grotto, we came upon a passage, two or three yards wide and about as high, leading further back into the bowels of the mountain. We groped into it a few steps, but it sloped sharply downward and was wet, so we retreated out of it, it being also pitch dark.

Returning along the other side of the cavern towards the fire-place we came upon a narrow opening, less than a yard wide and not much over a yard high. It led into a passage which sloped upwards and was free from moisture. Agathemer was for exploring it. I remonstrated. He insisted. After some expostulation I bade him stand at the opening, which was out of sight of the gleam of daylight at the entrance, being behind a big shoulder of rock further in than the fire-place. While he stood as I told him I went out towards the middle of the cavern floor till I could see the fireplace, though very dimly, and the entrance, quite clearly, by the mellow glow at it from the outer sunshine reflected along the walls of the twice bent entrance-passage.

When I had reached a position from which I could certainly see the entrance and from which, as Agathemer told me, I could be seen by him, I told him I would stay there while he explored the little passage into the side of the cavern. I adjured him to be cautious and not venture himself recklessly in the pitch dark. He declared he could feel his way safely some distance and be sure of returning. Then he crawled into the narrow opening.

Before I had waited long enough to grow impatient, I heard him call:

"Why, I can see you!"

The voice came not from the direction of the opening into which he had crawled, but from near the fire-place.

"Where are you?" I called back.

"Over here," said he, "come towards me."

Advancing towards the voice and peering into the dimness, where the light dispersed from the entrance made the darkness of the cavern just a little less dark than blackness, I saw him standing on the sill, as it were, of the opening up in the wall, beyond the fire-place as one approached from the entrance, and above the vertical wall of rock.

He had found a passage just big enough to crawl through leading from the aperture up to this species of gallery-alcove. The passage curved and was not much over twenty yards long. He pulled me up to the gallery and we crawled back together out of the aperture by which he had entered the passage. The whole passage was dry, unlike the floor of the cave.

"I tell you what we ought to do," said Agathemer, "let us go outside and gather armfuls of small leafy boughs and twigs. These we can throw up into that gallery-opening and make a fine bed there where it is dry. Then we can get a good safe sleep, and we need a long sound sleep."

We did as he suggested till we had leaves enough for a good bed. Then we ate, sparingly, for we had not much food in our wallets. After eating we wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and went to sleep; Agathemer with his wallet beside him and his head on his arm, I with my wallet under my head.

I wakened with a hand over my mouth and with Agathemer's voice in my ear saying:

"Keep still! Lie still! Don't move or speak! Lie still!"

He spoke in a tense whisper, so low that I could hardly understand him with his mouth against my ear, so full of terror that the tone of it startled me wide awake.

My first impression was of a glaring orange light on the roof of the cavern and a diffused reflection of it or from it on the roof of our gallery-alcove.

"Keep your head down!" Agathemer whispered. "If you turn over, turn over quietly."

I did turn over, very slowly, a muscle at a time and with great precautions to avoid rustling the leaves or twigs of the bed on which we lay.

As soon as I turned over I perceived that a good, big fire must be burning on the fire-place and that the light on the cavern roof was the direct glare from that, while the subdued glow on the roof of our alcove was the light reflected from the farther wall of the cavern or from its roof.

As our alcove was separated from the fire by a jutting pillar of rock, no direct light from the fire fell on its opening; it and we were well in the shadow. So shadowed we could hunch ourselves forward as far as we dared and peer down into the cave.

Its floor was littered with wallets, blankets, staffs and other foot-farers' gear. About it sat groups of men, every one with a sheath-knife or dagger in his belt. I counted forty and there were more out of sight round the shoulder of rock between our alcove and the fire-place.

We smelt flesh roasting or boiling. The squatting groups seemed busy with preparations for a meal.

The men, except one lad like a shepherd, did not look Italian. Some struck me as Spanish, others as Gallic, one or two as runaway slaves of mongrel ancestry. Nearly all of them had the unmistakable carriage and bearing of soldiers, even specifically of soldiers of out-of-the-way garrisons, in the mountains or on frontiers. Yet their behavior was tin-soldierly. I judged them discharged campaigners with an admixture of deserters and outlaws. They all had travellers' umbrella hats, and all had thrown them off; their cloaks were coarse and rough, many torn, but none patched, their tunics similar; their boots of Gallic fashion, coming up nearly to the knee, like Sicilian hunting-boots. They were all black-haired and shock-headed, all swarthy, and most of them of medium height and solidly built. They did not talk loud and they all talked at once, so that we made out little of what was said and nothing informing.

I could not but remark that, although the weather was exceedingly hot and the fire seemed large, it made no difference whatever in the feeling of the very slightly damp, gratefully cool and evenly mild air of the cavern.

Presently the food was ready and was distributed: goat's-flesh, roasted or broiled, some sort of coarse bread or quickly-made cakes, wine aplenty, olives and figs. While they ate most of them sat in groups; some stood by twos or threes; a few stood singly. From their looks, attitudes, the direction in which they faced and other indications, we inferred that

their chief was seated to the right of the fire, between it and us, with his back to the pillar of rock and just out of sight of us around it. Some appeared to be standing in a half-circle before him, listening to him, or conversing with him. A few of the men ate alone, sitting, standing or walking about.

One of these, munching a while as he strolled back and forth, came and took his stand behind and outside of the respectful half circle, standing facing the fire. When he finished eating and his face quieted as he stood there silent, gazing at something out of our sight, all at once, simultaneously, I gripped Agathemer and he gripped me. The fellow was Caulonius Pelops, two years before secretary to the overseer of my uncle's estate near Consentia in Bruttium. He had run away not long before my uncle's death.

I stared at him, revolving in my mind the difference of the attitude of mind towards runaway slaves of a former master who catches sight of a runaway from his estates and of the same being while pretending himself to be a runaway. I could have laughed out loud at the contrast between the feelings towards Pelops which I felt surge up in me and the feelings I hoped for towards me, say in Tarrutenus Spinellus.

Pelops, of course, knew me perfectly, knew Agathemer as well, would recognize either of us at sight. Therefore, if we were now discovered, we saw lost all that we had thought to gain and thought we had gained by our crawl through the drain pipe and the other features of our escape up to now. If Pelops set eyes on me, he, at least, would know that I was yet alive, he might tell all the band; if he told them, any one of them, even if not he himself, might inform the authorities and put new life into the search for me, if it had not been abandoned, or revive it if it had; put every spy in Italy on the alert to catch me: or even betray me to the nearest magistrate.

And Pelops had always disliked me and had always envied and hated Agathemer. We were keyed up with anxiety.

Just as we recognized Pelops a tall, red-headed, sandy lout, with a long neck and a prominent gullet-knot, came forward into sight from the direction of the entrance, apparently from beyond the fire. He put up his right hand and called, slowly and clearly:

"Eating time is over: Now we hold council!"

The men speedily assembled in curving rows facing the fire and sat or stood as they pleased, all facing where we inferred that their leader sat, to the right of the fire-place out of our sight round the bulge of the shoulder of rock.

Between them and the fire, just far enough from it for him to be visible to us, a burly shock-headed, black-haired southern Gaul took his stand.

Then we clearly heard a voice, which we inferred must be the leader's, a voice distinct and far-carrying, but a voice amazingly soft, mild and gentle, say:

"Council is called. Let all other men be silent. Caburus is to speak."

The burly Gaul began blusteringly, with a strong southern Gallic accent like a Tolosan:

"It is no use, Maternus, trying to bamboozle us with your everlasting serenity. We decline to be fooled any longer. Somehow, by sorcery or magic, you infused into us the greatest enthusiasm for your crazy project. You've dragged us over the Alps and into these Apennines. On the way we've talked matters over among ourselves. The nearer we get to Rome the crazier our errand seems. We have made fools of ourselves under your leadership long enough. We go no further.

"We admit that Commodus ought to be killed; we admit that, if he were killed, it would be a good thing for all Gaul and for Spain and Britain, too, and, we suppose, for Italy and all the provinces. We also admit that it would be a fine thing for us if we could kill Commodus, avoid getting killed or caught ourselves, and win the rewards we could properly hope for from the next Emperor, and the glory we'd have at home as successful heroes.

"But, when free from the spell of your eloquence, we see no chance of killing the Emperor and surviving to reap the reward of our prowess: none of surviving: not even any of killing him. You say you have a perfect and infallible plan which you will reveal when the time comes. You may have a plan and it may be infallible and as certain of success as the sun is certain of rising tomorrow and the day after. But we have followed you and your secret plan long enough. We follow no further unless we know what plan we are expected to take part in. We have all agreed to that and we all stick to that."

And the assemblage chorused:

"We have all agreed to that and we all stick to that."

Now, from, where we peered down from our hiding-place Maternus was entirely out of sight. We could not see what attitude he took nor what expression his face wore. Yet, by the flickering light of the leaping fire, which flooded the cavern with its ruddy glare, we could plainly see the effect of his personality on the assemblage. Even as their shouts of assent to what Caburus had said still rang through the cave I could see them half fawning, half cringing towards their chief.

Yet his voice, when he spoke, was not harsh or domineering, but, while perfectly audible, as bland and placid as a girl's.

"Please remember," he said, "that a plan such as I have conceived, while it is, if carried out as designed, as certain of success as the swoop of the hawk upon the hare, is certain of success only while it is not only undreamed of by its object but totally unsuspected by anyone outside of our band. The success of our project depends on no one having any inkling of any such project, far less having an inkling of what kind of a project it is.

"For your sakes and for your sakes only have I kept the details of my plans locked in my own bosom. You are venturing your lives to help me to the realization of my hopes of setting free the world. Your lives must not be risked needlessly. Little will be the risk any of you will run in carrying out my plans, so ingeniously are they conceived. But that smallness of risk can be attained only if the nature of the project is unknown to anyone save myself up to the latest possible moment before putting it into effect. Every day, every hour, which elapses between the giving of my instructions and their execution increases the danger of our betrayal. We must have guides, we must, occasionally, induct into our society new associates. Not one of these can be a danger to us as long as the methods by which we are to effect our purpose is unknown except to me. I propose no loitering in Rome. I mean to arrive at the right spot at the right hour, at the hour of opportunity, to strike and to vanish before anyone save ourselves knows that the blow has been struck. Only thus can we succeed, only thus can we escape. Upon my silence our success depends. Once I speak, every day, every hour makes it more likely that someone will betray to some outsider the nature of our plot or even its details. Then we shall certainly fail and perish."

Thereupon ensued a long wrangle in which Caburus repeated that Maternus had said all that before and Maternus repeated the same argument in other words and brought up other similar arguments. The crowd, while swayed by Maternus, appeared to lean more and more to the opinions of Caburus. It became manifest that they would break away and disperse unless Maternus revealed his intentions. He was, apparently, quick to sense the situation and finally yielded.

"I have three separate plans," he said, "and I mean to prepare to use all three, so that, if the first fails the second may succeed; if both the first and second fail I may hope to succeed with the third.

"I mean to reach Rome two days before the Festival of Cybele and for all of us to get a sound night's sleep. Then, on the eve of the great day, most of you may wander about the city sight-seeing; Caburus and I and a few with us will buy or hire costumes for the Festival.

"As we have all heard, the wildest license in costumes is permitted on the day of the celebration. Everybody dresses up as extravagantly as possible. More than that it is so customary for jokers to dress up in burlesque of notables that such assumptions of the costumes of officials are merely laughed at and the wearers of them are never arrested or even reprimanded.

"Caburus and I will buy at old-clothing shops or hire from costumers cast off uniforms of the privates of the Praetorian Guard. Two squads of us, all volunteers and approved as boldest, strongest and quickest, will dress up as Praetorians. One will be led by Caburus and I myself shall lead the other.

"Caburus and his men will mingle with the crowd along the line of the morning procession. The procession is so long, its route is so jammed with sight-seeing rabble, the rabble is permitted so close to the line of the procession, so many wonders and marvels form part of the procession, there is so much interest in gazing at them, that it is possible that Caburus may see a chance to achieve our object. I shall leave it to him whether to give whatever signal he may agree on with his men, or to withhold it. If he sees an opportunity, that will mean that, in his judgment, there is a good chance of killing the tyrant and getting away unrecognized. You know how cautious Caburus is: you will run no risk if he does not give the signal and little if he does.

"Now, Caburus, what do you think of this plan?"

Not being able to watch Maternus making his speech, I, while straining my ears to catch his softly uttered words, had kept my eyes on Caburus, had marvelled to see the dogged spirit of opposition and surly disaffection fade out of his expression, to see interest and excitement take their place.

"I think," he shouted, "that you are a marvel! I don't wonder that you wanted to conceal this plan till the last possible moment. It is so good that I already want to tell it to somebody, just to see his amazement. But we'll keep your secret! And as to your plan, I'll risk it. No Gaul with a drop of sporting blood in his veins would hesitate to embrace the opportunity to try to carry out so ingenious, so promising a plan.

"And you don't need a second plan or third plan. This plan, under my leadership, is certain to succeed."

At this a scrawny, tow-headed, long-armed, long-legged fellow sprang to his feet.

"I don't agree with that at all," he vociferated.

"Just because the first plan pleases Caburus is no reason why we should not hear the other two plans also."

This utterance started a long discussion, from which Agathemer and I learned nothing except that there was much insubordination among the men following Maternus and that the scrawny objector was named Torix.

The upshot of the discussion was a general agreement that Maternus ought to disclose all three plans.

Maternus then resumed:

"The second plan is already known to Cossedo and it need not be known to anyone else, as he alone is concerned and he, if Caburus decides not to make his attempt, will attempt his alone, without any assistance from anyone and without endangering anyone else; in fact without endangering himself. I myself thought of this plan, which is so ingenious that, if it succeeds, no one will ever know how Commodus came to his death; if it fails no one will ever suspect that it was tried at all.

"You have all been wondering how Cossedo came to be with us. Many of you have jeered him; many of you have protested to me. But I know what I am doing. Cossedo can do other things besides walk the tight-rope, juggle five balls at once, and stand on his head on the back of a galloping horse. He is just the right man to carry out my idea, which neither I nor any other of us could put into effect. As Cossedo approves the plan; as he is to try it alone, no one else need know it."

"Just so," cried the red-headed lout who had heralded the council, coming forward into the fire-light. "I can try it and I may do it. If I do it, Commodus will be a corpse. If I fail, no one will know I have tried. And it is a jewel of a plan."

And he stood on his hands, feet wagging in the air, apparently from mere exuberance of spirits. Standing up again, he threw three flip-flops forward, then two backward, then turned a half a dozen cart wheels, during which gyrations he passed out of our field of view.

Torix sulkily agreed that the second plan remain unknown except to Maternus and Cossedo, the assemblage not supporting him when he pressed for its disclosure. But he was insistent about the third plan.

"The third plan," said Maternus, "is merely the first plan over again, except that I lead instead of Caburus and that we try after dark instead of by day. From all I can hear the opportunity will be even better by torchlight in the gardens about the temple than it will be by day in the jammed streets. I mean to be as cautious as I expect Caburus to be: there is no use making an attempt unless a really promising chance presents itself. If I see an opening I'll kill the monster myself, and I do not expect to need any help from anybody, except a little jostling in the crowd to increase the confusion. As rigged up in Praetorian uniforms we will be laughed at and indulged. Either in the noonday swelter or in the torchlit darkness it ought to be easy to pass from aping, mimicking and burlesquing Praetorians to personating and counterfeiting Praetorians. Once mistaken for real guards we ought to be able to get close to Commodus. Then in the torchlight it should be easy for me to finish him and for you others to escape. I shall not think of escape until the deed is done. Then I'll escape, if I can, but I shall let no thought of escape interfere with my doing what I purpose."

This speech was acclaimed by everyone except Torix. He said:

"All this is most ingenious. But there is in this plan one flaw which no one has noted. I suppose that you, Maternus, evolved this really promising idea from pondering on what Claudius told us. All the hearsay about Rome and its festivals which ever came to the ears of all of us put together is as nothing at all compared with what Claudius told us in two months. Claudius had lived in Rome, Claudius knew every alley in Rome. With Claudius to pilot us we might have hoped to succeed. But Claudius is dead, dead somewhere in the Alps, where he is no use to us. He had seen the Emperor, he knew him by sight. Not one of us does. And, as Claudius told us, at the Festival of Cybele, as at several other religious festivals, the Emperor does not wear his official robes, so that anyone may recognize him, but appears in the garb of a priest of the deity celebrated, as High Priest or Assistant High Priest, or as a dignitary of some other degree, the rank in the hierarchy varying with the deity worshipped.

"Now not one of us, who have never set eyes on him, can tell Commodus, in the garb of a priest of Cybele, from any other priest of Cybele. We have no reasonable assurance of recognizing the mark at which we aim. Thus we have only a small chance of success, by sunlight or torchlight."

This utterance started another wrangle; the men, apparently, about equally divided as backers of Maternus and of Torix. As I lay listening to this hubbub someone stepped on the calf of my leg, his foot slipped off of it, and he fell on top of me, with a smothered exclamation.

"Who are you?" he demanded, adding some words which I did not catch. It seemed that another man was occupied similarly with Agathemer. The man who had fallen on me, in the act of scrambling up, yelled out:

"Here are two men lying and listening and they do not seem to belong to us. They do not respond to the pass-word."

At that every voice stilled and every face turned to our alcove-balcony where our captors, now four, gripped us and had lifted us to our knees.

"Throw 'em down!" came a chorus of voices, "throw 'em down!"

Down we were thrown, none too tenderly, but we landed without breaking any bones.

Two men clutched each of us and haled us towards the fire. There we had our first glimpse of Maternus, who sat on a pack, his back against the rock, not too close to the fire, the light of which played on his left cheek.

He looked plump and lazy.

"Strip them," he commanded.

As he was being obeyed somebody did something to the fire which increased the light it gave.

"Turn them round," Maternus commanded. "Humph," he commented, "by their faces they are a Roman gentleman and his Greek secretary; by their backs they are fugitive slaves with bad records."

"They are both branded," added Torix, who had been inspecting us.

"Where?" queried Maternus. "I don't see any brand marks."

"On the left shoulder, each of them," Torix replied.

"Humph!" Maternus commented, "rascally slaves and indulgent master, or canny owner of valuable, if restive, property."

Just as he said this there was a yell at our left and Caulonius Pelops rushed in from somewhere beyond the firelight, probably from outside the cave.

"Here's the solution of our dilemma," he cried. "We are all right now. We've two men who know Commodus by sight. This is Andivius Hedulio, my former master's nephew, and the other is his secretary, Agathemer."

"What, in the name of Mithras," Maternus breathed, "is your master's nephew doing in a cave in the Apennines, with his back all scourge-marks and a runaway-slave brand on his shoulder?"

Then ensued a long series of questions and answers, in the course of which Agathemer and I pretty well told our story.

Maternus asked the assemblage whether they believed us and the consensus was that they believed us and Pelops, who reminded them that Claudius had read to them lists of those involved in conspiracies, who had been executed or banished and their properties confiscated; that my name had been among those he read; and that he, Pelops, had then told about me; all of which most of them did not recollect at all, and the few who claimed to recollect it recollected only vaguely.

Maternus, in his mild way, suggested that we would make valuable additions to their association. Torix opposed the idea, but Maternus pointed out that no one of them had as much to gain by the Emperor's death as I had: that after it I might hope to be restored to my rank and wealth, and that, after my miseries, I ought to hate Commodus more viciously than any of them. The assemblage approved, and, while throat-cutting was not mentioned, as that was the obvious alternative, Agathemer and I took oath as brothers in the confraternity.

Upon this we were released and our wallets, cloaks, hats and staffs, which had been deposited before Maternus, were restored to us. But Maternus informed us that no member of the band was allowed any money of his own. We must give up to him any coins we had.

Agathemer spread his cloak, spread mine on it, and upon it I emptied my wallet, that all might see its contents. I was allowed to retain everything, except the denarii. Agathemer did the like, with the like result. But at the sight of his flageolet there were exclamations and questions. He kept it out when he repacked his belongings, only giving the coins to Maternus. After we had fed he played tunes on it, to the delight of the whole band. It seemed to me they would never let him stop playing that flageolet and I was desperately drowsy.

At last all were for sleep. Maternus decreed that Agathemer and I might climb up again on the dry shelf where we had been found. Neither he nor any of the band seemed to object to, or indeed to notice, the dampness of the cave floor.

Agathemer and I slept at once. Our precious amulet-bags, of course, had not been investigated, or so much as suspected, and were safe on our neck- thongs.

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CHAPTER XVII THE FESTIVAL

Thus most strangely, and through no fault of mine, I found myself a full fledged formally sworn member of a conspiracy against the life of Commodus.

Maternus, whether from innate considerateness or because it happened to coincide with his plans, let us have our sleep out and wake naturally. We woke hungry and fed with the whole band, totalling forty-nine with ourselves, according to my count and to the statement of Pelops. He was most absurdly, but naturally, more than a little shy and bashful at finding himself in a position of complete equality with me. As we ate he narrated his reasons for running away and how he had escaped to Clampetia, from there on a fishing-boat to Sarcapus in Sardinia, and from there on a trading ship to Marseilles. There he had attached himself to a slave- dealer and with him had travelled to Tolosa and Narbo, where he had gotten into trouble and had fled to the mountains. There he had joined some outlaws, who had joined Maternus.

The fellows who had found me and Agathemer told cheerfully how the shepherd lad, their local guide, who knew nothing of them except that they were accepted associates of some local mountain brigands, had been showing them the inner passages of the cave, into which Agathemer and I had not ventured, and, on their return, had proposed to lead them up the side- passage to the outlook-opening. There they had trodden on us and so captured us.

After eating we set out on our way southwards to Rome.

On the march, inevitably, I became acquainted with Maternus and marvelled at that most amazing man. I had heard of him, of course, for his exploits as mutineer, outlaw, insurgent and rebel had made him notorious, not only in Spain and Gaul, but in Italy, even among the circles of society amid which I moved by inheritance. His reputation for strength, vigor, valor, resolution, ruthlessness, ferocity and cunning had made me picture him as different as possible from what he really was.

He was neither tall nor burly and nothing about him gave any hint of the great strength for which he was reputed and which, on occasion, I have seen him exert. Only one man of the band was shorter than Maternus and no other looked so much the reverse of hard and tough.

Maternus, in fact, looked soft. His very outline was plump, his feet and hands small, his toes and fingers delicate. He was not a handsome man, but he was by no means ill-looking and in some respects was almost boyish, or even girlish. He had glossy, straight brown hair, soft brown eyes, a complexion almost infantile in its rosy freshness, and all his features were small, his ears close to his head, his mouth even tiny, his nose likewise: and withal, Maternus was habitually mild, serene of expression, slow and soft of speech, and deliberate in all his movements. I never heard him raise his voice or speak or act hurriedly or urgently.

Of course, I had been dumbfounded to find him in Italy and in the Apennines when everybody supposed him a hunted fugitive, hiding in the Pyrenees or the Cevennes; or even, perhaps, in the wilds of North Spain. Still more was I amazed at the boldness of a man who could conceive such plans for assassinating the Prince of our Republic and could feel serenely confident of being able to execute them.

He was perfectly open with me. He had been a worshipper and adorer of Aurelius. If Aurelius had lived to a reasonable old age, he averred, the Republic would have been firmly established, the Empire solidified, the administration purified and the frontiers defended. Everything that had happened in the past five years he blamed on Commodus. It was the indifference of Commodus which had ruined the administration of the army, so that incompetent, dishonest, and tyrannical under-officers drove young patriots like himself into mutiny, outlawry and their consequences. Had Commodus been a capable ruler he and his fellow malcontents would have been listened to, placated and sent off, aflame with patriotic enthusiasm and bent on redeeming their past records, to hurl back from the hardest-pressed part of our frontiers the most dangerous foes of the Republic. Upon Commodus he blamed his mutiny, all the atrocities he had committed in the course of his insurrections, and all the blood he had shed, as well as all the towns he had sacked and burnt in the course of his raids; also on Commodus he blamed the destruction of his army of insurgents.

He freely discussed with me his plans for assassinating Commodus. I could not deny that they were brilliantly conceived.

Almost equally brilliant I thought his management of his expedition. From where I joined it, near the crest of the Apennines, somewhere between the head-waters of the Trebia and the Nura, we advanced on Rome as rapidly as footfarers could travel. In the Ligurian Apennines, until we had crossed the upper tributaries of the Tarus, the Macra and the Auser, and were between Luna and Pistoria, we travelled all together, tramping all night in single file after a guide and sleeping all day in well hidden camps. Everywhere we were well fed. Nowhere did we lose our way or meet anyone not forewarned and friendly. It was as if the highwaymen, brigands and outlaws of the whole

Empire had formed an association, so that any of them could travel secretly anywhere by the help of those of the regions which they crossed. We advanced as if swift and reliable runners had preceded us, advised of our approach the outlaws of each district and they had prepared to entertain us and to forward us on our way.

From somewhere between Pistoria and Luca we broke up into small parties of three to seven, and travelled by day like ordinary wayfarers. Somewhere not far south of the Arnus we reassembled, evidently by prearrangement and as accurately as a well-managed military-expedition. Through the mountains past Arretium we marched at night as in the Apennines. Again somewhere to the west of Clusium, before we reached the Pallia, we again dispersed. We struck the Clodian Highway about halfway between Clusium and the Pallia. From there we proceeded like ordinary footfarers.

Both between Pistoria and Arretium, along the byroads, and from the Pallia to Rome, on the Clodian Highway, I was in the party headed by Maternus himself, a party of five besides us two. When we dispersed near Luca I had noted that Torix, Pelops and Cossedo with two more made a party; and that Caburus took Agathemer with him.

As Maternus had been open with me about his past and his plans so he was perfectly frank about his attitude towards me.

"I assume," he said, "that you are delighted at the opportunity which chance and I have given you to assist in revenging yourself on Commodus. I similarly assume that you and Agathemer would keep any oath taken by you. But prudence compels a leader like me to take no chances. I must, as a wary guardian of my associates, take all possible precautions. You will understand."

We did understand. We were watched as if he assumed that we were on the alert for a chance of escape, as we were. On night marches a leathern thong was knotted about my waist and the ends knotted similarly about the waists of the man before me and the man behind me. Agathemer was made secure in a like fashion. When he lay down to sleep, after he had composed himself to rest, a blanket was spread over him and a burly ruffian lay down on either side of him, the edges of the blanket under them. I slept similarly guarded. On day marches Caburus kept Agathemer close to him; I was never out of sight of Maternus.

Somewhere in the Etrurian hills north of Arretium I overheard part of a conversation between Maternus and Caburus. They were talking of me and Agathemer.

"You cannot be sure," said Maternus. "By every rule of reason Hedulio ought to hate Commodus consumedly. But loyalty is so inbred in senators and men of equestrian rank,

in all the Roman nobility, that he may have a soft place in his heart for him, after all. Instead of doing his best to help us kill him he might try to shield him, at a pinch."

"Just what I have been thinking," said Caburus. "I am half in doubt about this enterprise, even now. Agathemer may after all, try to fool me and to shield Commodus, by pointing out some other man to me, at the crucial moment."

"If you suspect him of anything of the kind," said Maternus gently, "just drive your dirk good and far into him and be done with him. I'll be on the lookout for any hanky-panky from Hedulio. If I see the wrong look in his eye or the wrong expression on his face I'll make a quick end of him. I'll tolerate no treachery after oath given and oath taken."

It may easily be imagined how nervous and uncomfortable I felt after hearing this mild, soft-voiced utterance.

My anxiety was accentuated within an hour. Just as I, like the other members of the band, was composing myself to sleep, I heard high words, raised voices, threats, an oath and a yell. With the rest I rushed towards the sounds. There, with the rest, I saw Caulonius Pelops in the agonies of death, a dagger in his heart. One of our Spanish associates had momentarily lost his temper.

Maternus, calm and unruffled, mildly inquired the causes of the quarrel, affirmed his belief in the Spaniard's account, absolved him of all blame and ordered Pelops buried. Then, as if nothing happened, we all composed ourselves to sleep.

I did not sleep much. Evidently, stabbing on small provocation was taken as a matter of course among my present comrades.

At Vulsinii we had a sound sleep at an inn and a bountiful meal at dawn. We needed both before dark, for Maternus marched us the entire twenty-eight miles to Forum Cassii by sunset. I was in as hard condition as any of his band and I stood the long tramp well. Next day we paused for barely an hour, near noon, at Sutrium, and made the twenty-three miles to Baccanae easily. The third day we even more easily made the twenty-one from Baccanae to Rome. Rome, naturally, I approached with emotion. I had gazed back on it from the road to Tibur, certain that I should never again behold it. And I was now about to enter it under most amazing circumstances, as the associate of cutthroats and ruffians, as a sworn member of a conspiracy to assassinate the Prince of the Republic, as the prisoner of a ruthless outlaw, as a suspected associate of a chieftain who might stab me at the slightest false action, motion, word, tone or look.

There is, I think, no view of Rome as one approaches it along the Via Clodia or the Via Flaminia which is as fine as anyone of a score from points on the Via Salaria and Via Tiburtina. But, on a clear, mild, mellow summer afternoon I caught glorious glimpses of the city from the higher points of the road as we neared it. The sight moved me to tears, tears which I was careful to conceal. I could not but note the fulfillment of the prophecy made by the Aemilian Sibyl. I could not but hope that I might survive to see Rome under happier circumstances.

Amid manifold dangers as I was, I was not gloomy. We entered the city by the Flaminian Gate, of course, and, in the waning light, walked boldly the whole length of the Via Lata, diagonally across from the Forum of Trajan, under his Triumphal Arch, through the Forum of Augustus, and across, the Forum of Nerva past the Temple of Minerva and so to the Subura. All the way from the City Gate to the slum district I marvelled at Maternus: he never asked his way, took every turn correctly; and, amid the splendors of Trajan's Forum, behaved like a frequenter, habituated to such magnificence. Equally did he seem at home amid such crowds as he could never have mingled with. He comported himself so as to attract no remark.

As we passed the Temple of Minerva I sighed and remarked that I would give anything short of life itself for a bath.

"You need not give that much; we can bathe for a quadrans, and, since you mention it, we shall all be better for a bath."

"There is no reason why you and the rest should not bathe," I rejoined, ruefully, "but with my back and shoulder a bath is no place for me."

"Pooh!" laughed Maternus, "you grew up in Rome and I never set foot in it till today, yet you know no bath you dare enter, while I can lead you to a bath-house where no one will heed or notice brand-marks or scourge-sears."

It was, in fact, close by and I had the first vapor bath I had enjoyed since leaving Villa Spinella. After we left the bath Maternus bought three cheap little terra-cotta lamps and a small supply of oil.

At the cheaper sort of cook-shop we ate a hearty meal, with plenty of very bad wine. Then we went where, manifestly, arrangements had been made for our lodging, in a seven-story rookery, such as I had never entered and had hardly seen from outside. Its entrance was from the Subura and opened near the middle of one of the long sides of the courtyard, the pavement of which was very uneven from irregular sinking and its many shaped stones much worn. Out in it, at almost equal distances from the ends, the sides

and each other, stood two circular curb-walls, each about a yard high; one the well, whence was drawn all the water used by the inmates; the other the sewer-opening, down which went all manner of refuse. The ascent to the upper stories was by an open stone stair in one corner of the court. All round the court was an open arcaded corridor, running behind the stair in its corner. Above it were six similar arcaded galleries, one for each upper floor. The rooms, judging from those into which I looked through open doors, appeared all alike. Ours were floored, walled and roofed with coarse cement, full of small broken stone, and not very smoothly finished. The floors were worn smooth by long use. The only opening to each was the door, over which was a latticed window reaching to the vaulted ceilings of the gallery and room.

Our rooms were on the fourth floor. There were three rooms, each with three canvas cots. Maternus left the six others to dispose themselves as they pleased. He and I took the middle room. Quite as a matter of course he bolted the door, drew his cot across it, and as soon as I had composed myself to sleep, sat on his cot and blew out the little terra-cotta lamp.

Next morning he quite unaffectedly discussed with me what he was to do with me.

"In Rome, anywhere in Rome," he said, "you are likely to be recognized any moment. I took the risk yesterday evening; I had to, I never attempt impossibilities or worry over manifest necessities. But I never run unnecessary risks. The natural thing to do with you is to leave you in this room all day with two of my lads to watch you. I do not want to irritate you, but I see no other way."

"I'll agree to come back here and stay here quietly," I said, "if you will let me go out first for a while with you or any man or men you choose. I want to go to the Temple of Mercury and I want you to give me back enough of my money to buy two white hens to offer to the god."

"You surprise me," he said. "I shouldn't have expected a man of your origin to pay particular attention to gaining the favor of Mercury. He is more in the line of men like me. I am first and always devoted to Mithras, of course. But Mercury comes high up on my list. I've a mind to take the risk, go with you and buy four hens, two for you and two for me."

Actually we went out together shortly after sunrise, down the Subura, through Nerva's Forum, and diagonally across the Forum itself. There I quaked, for fear of being recognized; and marvelled at the coolness of Maternus. He feasted his eyes and mind on the gorgeousness about us, but with such discretion that no one could have conjectured that he was a foreigner, viewing Rome for the first time.

On down the Vicus Tuscus we went into the meat market, where he bought four plump, young, white hens. As we started on with them, each of us carrying two, he asked his first question.

"What building is that?" nodding.

"The Temple of Hercules," I told him.

"I thought so," he said, "they always build his circular. We'll stop in there on our way back. I never miss a chance to ask his help."

Whereas, when I made my offering before my flight the previous year, the street had been deserted, since I passed along it within an hour after sunrise, now it was humming with unsavory life, the eating-stalls under the vaults crowded, throngs about the Babylonian and Egyptian seers who prophesied anyone's future for a copper, tawdry hussies leering before the doors of their dens, unsavory louts chatting with some of them, idlers everywhere. This festering cess-pool of humanity Maternus regarded with disdain and contempt manifest to me, but carefully concealed behind a bland expression.

When we came out of the Temple of Mercury, after making our offering, Maternus whispered:

"Walk very much at ease and as if your mind were as much as possible at peace; two men opposite are watching us."

I assumed my most indifferent air and carefully avoided looking across the street, except for one cautious glance from the lowest step of the Temple. Then I glimpsed, leaning against a pier of the outer arcade of the Circus Maximus, two men wrapped in dingy cloaks, for the morning had been cool. After we were in the Temple of Hercules, Maternus asked:
"Did you recognize them?"

"One I had never seen," I replied. "The other I have seen before, but I do not know who he is nor where I have seen him."

Not until after midnight that night did it suddenly pop into my head that he was the same man whom I had first seen on horseback in the rain on the crossroad above Vediumnum, the man whom Tanno had asserted was a professional informer and accredited Imperial spy, the man who had glanced into Nemestronia's garden and seen me with Egnatius Capito.

After we left the Temple of Hercules I expected him to conduct me back to our lodgings for the day. He never suggested it, but kept me with him, strolling about the central parts of the city as if he had nothing to fear, walking all round the Colosseum and loitering through the Vicus Cyprius, frankly amused at the sights we saw there.

He had no difficulty in finding shops of costumers: on the eve of the Festival they displayed placards calling attention to their wares. The first we entered had no Praetorian uniforms; but, as if the request for them were a matter of course, its proprietor directed us to the shop of a cousin of his who made a specialty of them. There I was amazed that such laxity of law, or of enforcement of law, could possibly exist as would permit such a trade. There was evidently a regular manufacture for this festival of costumes simulating and travestyng those of the Imperial Body Guard. We were shown scores of them and the shop had them in a great pile.

The tunics were genuine tunics formerly worn by the actual Praetorian Guards but discarded and sold as worn or faded. There were also many such kilts and corselets and helmets. But as helmets, corselets and even kilts wore out or lost their freshness more slowly than tunics, there were many imitation kilts and corselets of sheepskin painted, and many cheap, light helmets of willow-wood, covered with dogskin. But all these had genuine plumes, as cast-off plumes were even more plentiful than second-hand tunics.

As there was a strict enforcement of the law forbidding the sale, transport, storage or possession of the weapons of any part of the military establishment the shields and swords which went with the costumes were all imitations; flimsy, but astonishingly deceiving to the eye, even at a short distance. The shields were of sheep-skin stretched over an osier frame, but painted outside so as to present the appearance of the genuine Praetorian shields. The baldricks and belts were also of sheep-skin, the scabbards of willow-wood, and the blades of the wooden swords of fig-wood, so as to be completely harmless.

When Maternus proposed to hire twenty-one of these suits the proprietor took it as a customary transaction, inspected and counted twenty-one costumes and stated the charge for hiring them until the day after the Festival. But he also stated that he did not hire costumes except to his regular customers; strangers must not only make a deposit but produce as vouchers two Romans in good standing and well known. Seeing Maternus at a stick he added, easily and at once, that he sold costumes to any purchaser for cash, without question, and agreed to repurchase the same costumes after the Festival at nine denarii for every ten of the sale price, if the costumes were brought back in good condition; if damaged, he would even so repurchase them, but only at their damaged value.

Maternus at once agreed to buy on those terms and, without haggling, accepted the price asked and paid it in gold. He then arranged for porters to carry the costumes where he wanted them. This also was taken as a matter of course.

Followed by the porters we returned to our lodging. Maternus left two porters, with their loads, in the courtyard and with the third porter we climbed three flights of stairs. The porter bestowed his huge pack in my cell and there Maternus left me in charge of three of the men, with orders that two must watch me till he returned. The third was to be at my orders to fetch any eatables or drinkables I wanted; to this man Maternus gave a handful of carefully counted silver coins.

There I remained until next morning, sleeping all the time I could get to sleep and stay asleep; trying not to fret when awake; and by no means displeased with the food and wine brought me.

Maternus slept that night, as the night previous, with his cot across our door.

Next morning he said to me:

"I feel unusually reckless today. I've been thinking the matter over and it seems to me that, on the day of the Festival, there will be thousands of sightseers in dingy cloaks and umbrella hats. I am of the opinion that you will run little risk on the streets anywhere in the poorer quarters of the city. I'm going to take you out with me to see the fun. We'll keep far away from where Caburus and Cossedo and their helpers are to take their stands. We'll see the morning fun and then eat a hearty meal and sleep all the afternoon."

Out we sallied, I and one varlet in our travelling outfit, Maternus and six more habited as imitation Praetorians. Two of the ruffians had a pretty taste in drollery and amused the crowd with buffooneries. Strange to say the crowds seemed to think that they travestied Praetorians to a nicety whereas neither had ever set eyes on a Praetorian and their antics were the product of mere innate whimsicality.

I found the procession really interesting, with its various wonders and marvels. I had never been in Rome at the time of the Feast of Cybele, which was, of all the Festivals of the Gods, peculiarly the poor man's frolic. And I had always wondered how it was possible so to tame and train two healthy full-grown male lions as to have them draw a chariot with Demeter's statue through miles of crowded streets. After seeing them pass I concluded that they were dazed by the glare, the crowds and the noise, and too cowed to be dangerous.

At the license in the streets I was amazed. I saw a dozen men, each attired as Prefect of the Palace; a score of loose women dressed in an unmistakable imitation of the Empress, consuls by scores and similar counterfeits of every honored official or acclaimed individual. In particular, every corner had a laborious presentation of Murmex Lucro, the most popular gladiator in Rome. Almost equally frequent were presentments of Agilius Septentrio, the celebrated pantomimist; and of Palus, champion charioteer.

And I saw, amid roars of laughter, jeers, cat-calls and plaudits, no less than three different roisterers got up, cautiously and in inexpensive stuffs, but recognizably, as caricatures of the Emperor himself; not, of course, in his official robes, but in such garments as he wore in his sporting hours. These audacious merry-makers were ignored by the police and military guards.

Not long after noon Maternus declared that he had had enough. We ate at a decidedly good cook-shop, where we had excellent food and good medium wine. When I waked near sunset Maternus reported that he had slept all the afternoon: certainly I had.

He then explained to me that he was to make his attempt in the Gardens of Lucius Verus, where Commodus had this year decreed the torchlight procession. He was again entirely frank.

"Your part," he said, "will be merely to point out Commodus to me. If I decide not to make any attempt on him I shall expect you to return here with me and abide by whatever decision our association makes at its next meeting: I cannot foresee whether they will vote to disband or to plan another venture. If I make my attempt, and I think I shall, for, apparently, both Caburus and Cossedo have blenched or failed, since no rumors of any excitement have reached us, you will be free the moment you see me stab Commodus. You must then look out for yourself and fend for yourself: you and I are never to meet again unless by some unimaginable series of miracles."

And he gave me four silver pieces, saying:

"This will keep you in food for a long time, if you are sparing. Good luck!"

Then, habited as in the morning, we sallied out, and ate at a cook-shop we had never before entered, which was full of revellers dressed as votaries of Isis, as Egyptians, as cut-laws, as Arabians, as anything and everything. And as we crossed the city on our way to the Aelian Bridge, as we were passing through a better part of it, I was struck with the craziness of the costumes, many imitating every imaginable style of garb: Gallic, Spanish, Moorish, Syrian, Persian, Lydian, Thracian, Scythian and many more; but

many also devised according to no style that ever existed, but invented by the wearers, in a mad competition to don the most fantastic and bizarre garb imagination could suggest.

In the torchlit gardens I perceived at once that it would be very easy for Maternus to edge close to the actual bodyguard, mingle with them, pass himself off as one, get near the Emperor and make a rush at him. He had chosen a spot where the procession was to circle thrice about a great statue of Cybele set up for that occasion on a temporary base in the middle of a round grass-plot. His idea was that I was to point out Commodus to him on the first round and he to consider the disposition of the participants in the procession and make his attempt on the second or third round.

Standing, as we did, in the front row of a mass of revellers packed as spectators along the incurved outer rim of the ring, we had a surpassingly good view of the procession as it entered the circle. There were various bands of votaries and then six eunuch priests, their faces whitened with flour, their garb a flowing robe of light vivid yellow, convoying a brace of panthers, pacing as sedately as the brace of lions in the morning procession, drawing a light chariot in which sat a diademed, robed and garlanded image of Cybele, very gaudy and garish. Behind the chariot paced two priests of Cybele, not Phrygian Eunuchs, but Roman officials, in their pontifical robes, a pair of dignified old senators, ex-consuls both, Vitrasius Pollio and Flavius Aper, full of self-importance. Then came the Chief Priest, tall, full-bearded, swarthy, his robes a blaze of gold and jewels, pacing solemnly, on either side of him, as assistant priest, a young Roman nobleman, chosen from the college of the Pontiffs of Cybele, habited in very gorgeous robes. One was Marcus Octavius Vindex, son of the ex-consul, a very handsome young man; the other, to my amazement, Talponius Pulto.

At sight of my life-long enemy who had always rebuffed my overtures towards the establishment of courteous relations between us, who had insulted me a thousand times, who had sponsored the informer whose insinuations had caused my downfall, revengeful rage and self-congratulation at my opportunity filled me.

For, between the two pompous old senators and this dignified, showy and impressive trio, capered a score of eunuch priests clashing cymbals and among them Commodus also clashing cymbals and amazingly garbed. I have never been able to conjecture how his headgear was managed. He had a band round his forehead and from that band rose a sphere of some light material, apparently a framework of whalebone covered with silk, a sphere fully a yard in diameter, all gleaming with the sheen of silk, and white with an unsurpassable whiteness. His robe, or tunic or whatever it was, was of the same or a similar glossy white silk. Round his neck was a golden collar, and gold anklets of a similar pattern clanked on his ankles. From the links or bosses of the collar to the links

or bosses of the anklets streamed silken ribbons of the same intense light yellow we had seen in the robes of the panther-keepers. Two of the eunuch priests fanned him with peacock feather fans, so that the ribbons fluttered and shimmered in the torchlight. He wore soft shoes or slippers of the same vivid yellow. Clashing his cymbals he shrieked and capered with the eunuch priests.

I was more than shocked to see the Prince of the Republic so degrade himself, to see him exhibit the acme of the craze for devising unimaginably fantastic costumes for this Festival.

Besides being shocked, I was terrified, even numb with terror. I knew that Maternus would never believe me if I indicated this gaping zany and asserted that it was our Emperor: yet Maternus had such an uncanny power of interpreting the expression of face of any interlocutor that I dreaded to tell him anything save the exact truth. I was in a dilemma, equally afraid to tell the truth, for fear the improbability of it would infuriate Maternus and convince him of my treachery; or to take the obvious course, for fear some subtle shade of my tone or look might similarly impel him to stab me.

As the convoy passed Maternus whispered, softly and unhurriedly:

"Which is he?"

In my panic I chose the less dangerous alternative. Pulto was by far the most Imperial figure in the throng; his great height, the fine poise of his head, his royal bearing, his regal expression, his stately port, all contributed to make him dominate the assemblage. I felt that Maternus might believe him Commodus and could never believe Commodus an Emperor or even a noble.

I indicated Pulto, haughty, dignified, handsome and magnificently habited.

Maternus, apparently, believed me implicitly.

He whispered again.

"I am sure to get him when they come round again. Watch for my blow. If I land or if I am seized, fend for yourself. Good luck and Mercury be good to both of us. Farewell."

As the procession came round again I could hear my heart thump; but, to my gaze, Maternus, handsome in his imitation Praetorian uniform, appeared the personification of calmness.

When again the Imperial zany and his fan-bearers and posturing eunuchs had passed us and the High Priest and his Acolytes were opposite us, Maternus slipped forward between two of the Praetorians of the escort.

At that instant I felt a grip on my arm and Agathemer's voice whispered:

"Come!"

Together we slunk back into the crowd, and when the yell arose behind us, presumably at sight of Pulto slaughtered by Maternus, we were well clear of the press and in the act of darting into the shrubbery. In fact we got clear away unpursued, unmolested, unhindered.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XVIII GALLOPING

As the Gardens of Verus are north of the Tiber we had no difficulty whatever in casting a wide circuit to the left and coming out on the Aurelian Highway. All the way to it we had met no one; on it we met no one. After striking the highway we walked along it as fast as we dared. We should have liked to run a mile or two, but we were careful to comport ourselves as wayfarers and not act so as to appear fugitives. The night was overcast and pitch dark. We must have walked fully four miles, which is about one third of the way to Loria.

Then, being tired and with no reason whatever for going anywhere in particular, we sat down to rest on the projecting base-course of a pretentious tomb of great size but much neglected. It was so dilapidated, in fact, that Agathemer, feeling about by where he sat, found an aperture big enough for us to crawl into. It began to rain and we investigated the opening. Apparently this huge tomb had been hastily built by dishonest contractors, for here, low down, where the substructure should have been as durable and solid as possible, they had cheapened the wall by inserting some of those big earthenware jars which are universally built into the upper parts of high walls to lighten the construction. A slab of the external shell of gaudy marbles had fallen out, leaving an aperture nearly as big as the neck of the great jar.

As the rain increased to a downpour we wriggled and squirmed through the hole, barely squeezing ourselves in, and found the jar a bit dusty but dry and comfortable. We wrapped ourselves in our cloaks, rejoicing to be out of the torrent of water which now descended from the sky. Also we composed ourselves to sleep, if we could.

We discussed our situation. We had our tunics, cloaks, umbrella hats and road shoes, but no staffs, wallets or extras. Agathemer mourned for his flageolet. Between us we had seven silver denarii and a handful of coppers; Maternus had given Agathemer four denarii, as he had me, but early in the day, and he had broken one to buy two meals.

He said that Caburus had either feared to make an attempt on Commodus, or judged that no opportunity presented itself. Of Cossedo he knew no more than I. Caburus had turned him over to two ruffians to watch and he had eluded them in the crowds and made his way to the Gardens of Verus expressly to find me, if possible, and help me to escape.

He said that our coins could not be made to last any length of time. Nor could we well beg our way so near the city. Our store of gems in our amulet-bags was of no use, because, as he said, he was personally known to every gem-expert in Rome. Perugia was the nearest town to northward where he might hope to find prompt secret buyers for gems of dubious ownership; Perugia was far beyond the reach of two footfarers, without wallets and with only seven denarii.

We argued that, whatever happened, the wisest course was to get some sleep. Agathemer declared that we could fast over next day and night, if necessary, and that we had best keep in our hole till next night, anyhow. I acceded and we went to sleep.

We were waked by loud voices in altercation. The sky had cleared, the late moon was half way up, and we conjectured that the time was about midway between midnight and dawn, the time when all roads are most deserted.

Close to us, plain in the brilliant moonlight, were two stocky men on roan or bay horses. The moonlight was bright enough to make it certain that they were wearing the garb of Imperial couriers. The trappings of their horses, frontlets, saddle cloths, saddle bags and all suited their attire.

But their actions, words, accents and everything about them was most discordant with their horses and equipment.

Both were so drunk that they could just stick on their stationary and impassive mounts, so drunk that they talked thickly. And they were disputing and arguing and wrangling with their voices raised almost to a shout. Thickly as they talked, we had listened to them but a few moments when we were sure that they were low-class highwaymen who had robbed two Imperial couriers, tied and gagged them, changed clothes with them and ridden off on their horses, but had stopped to drink, raw and unmixed, the couriers' overgenerous supply of heady wine; two kid-skins, by their utterances. Now they were reviling each other, each claiming a larger proportion of the coins than he had.

Here was a present from Mercury, indeed. It was a matter of no difficulty to crawl out of our hole, to approach Carex and Junco, as they called each other, to pluck their daggers from their sheaths and to render the highwaymen harmless, to pull them from their saddles, tie their hands with the lashings of their saddle-bags and to gag them with strips torn from their tunics; for they were too drunk to know that they were being attacked; so drunk that each, as we dragged him from his horse, fancied that the other was assaulting him and expostulated at such unfair behavior on the part of a pal. So drunk were they that both were snoring before we tied their feet with more strips torn from their tunics.

Like sacks we hauled them out of the moonlight, into the shadow of the tomb and then stripped them except of their tunics, fitted on ourselves the accoutrements they had stolen, and thrust them, trussed, gagged, snoring and helpless, into the hole where we had taken shelter.

On horseback we rode like couriers, full gallop, passed Loria before the first hint of dawn showed through the moonlight and, about half way between Fregena and Alsium turned aside into a lovely little grove about an old shrine of Ops Consiva, a grove whose beauty and the openness of whose tree-embowered, grass-carpeted spaces was plain even by the moonlight.

As soon as it was light enough to see we took stock of our windfall. The horses were both bays and of the finest; their trappings new and in perfect condition. Our attire was made up of the best horsemen's boots, a trifle too large for us, but not enough to be so noticeable as to betray us, or even enough to make us uncomfortable; of horsemen's long rain- cloaks and of excellent umbrella hats, all of the regulation material, design and color. In the saddle-bags were excellent blankets, our despatches, legibly endorsed with the name, Munatius Plancus, of the official at Marseilles to whom we were to deliver them; and our credentials, entitling us to all possible assistance from all men and to fresh horses at all change-houses. From these diplomas we learned that our names were Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper.

This crowned our luck. We crowed with glee over the unimaginably helpful coincidence that these diplomas should be made out for couriers with the very names which we had chosen at haphazard at the commencement of our flight and had been using to each other ever since.

The provision of cash was ample: besides plenty of silver there was more than enough gold to have carried us all the way to Marseilles, on the most lavish scale of expenditure, without resorting to our credentials to get us fresh horses.

We ate liberally of the couriers' generous provision of bread, cheese, sausage, olives and figs; well content to quench our thirst at the spring by the shrine. Then we muffled ourselves in our cloaks, tightened the straps of our umbrella hats, jammed them down on our heads, pulled the brims over our faces, mounted and set off, elated, sure of ourselves, well fed, well clad, well horsed, opulent, accredited, gay.

As couriers vary in their theories of horse-husbanding and in their practice of riding, we had a wide choice, and elected to get every mile we could out of these fine horses and not change until as far as possible from Rome. We found their most natural lope and,

pausing to drink and to water them sparingly at the loneliest springs we descried, we pressed on through or past the Towers, Pyrgos, and Castrum Novum to Centumcellae. That was all of forty-one miles from the shrine of Ops Consiva and full fifty from Rome, but, partly because we had to spare ourselves, as we had not been astride of a horse since we crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia, we so humored our horses that we arrived in a condition which the ostler took as a matter of course, and it was then not quite noon, which we both considered a feat of horsemanship.

At Centumcellae we ate liberally and enjoyed the inn's excellent wine. Also we set off on strong horses. From there only the danger of getting saddle-sick after our long disuse of horses and the certainty of getting saddle-sore, as we did, restrained us. We tore on through Martha, Forum Aurelii, and a nameless change-house, spurring and lashing as much as we dared, for we dared not disable ourselves with blisters, changing at each halt and getting splendid horses, our diplomas unquestioned. Thus at dusk we reached Cosa, forty-nine miles from Centumcellae and a hundred and nine miles from Rome.

We dreaded that we should wake too sore to ride, perhaps too sore to mount, perhaps even too sore to get out of bed. But, while stiff and in great pain, we managed to breakfast and get away.

That day we, perforce, rode with less abandon, though we both felt less discomfort after we warmed to the saddle. We nooned at Rosellae, thirty- three miles on, and slept at Vada, the port of Volaterrae, fifty-six miles further, a day of eighty miles. Next day we were, if anything, yet sorer and stiffer, certainly we were less frightened. So we took it easier, nooning at Pisa, thirty miles on, and sleeping at Luna, thirty-five further, a day of only sixty-five miles, rather too little for Imperial couriers. Our third morning we woke feeling hardened and fit: we made thirty-nine miles before noon and ate at Bodetia; from there we pushed on forty-five miles to Genoa, an eighty-four mile day, more in character.

At Genoa we were for taking the coast road. We were all for haste. We had ridden amazingly well for men who had not been astride of a horse for nearly a year; we had ridden fairly well for Imperial couriers; but we had not ridden fast enough to suit ourselves. From Cosa onward we had been haunted by the same dread. We had imagined the real Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix reporting their loss of everything save their tunics, we imagined the hue and cry after us, the most capable men in the secret service, riding fit to kill their horses on our trail. At Cosa, at Vada, at Luna we had waked dreading to find the avengers up with us and ourselves prisoners; at Rosellae, at Pisa, at Bodetia, we had eaten with one eye on the door, expecting every instant to see our pursuers enter; so at every change-station, while our trappings were taken from our weary cattle and girthed on fresh mounts. So we were for the coast road as shortest.

But the innkeeper, who was also manager of the change-stables, told us that between Genoa and Vada Sabatia the road was blocked by landslides, washouts and the destruction of at least three bridges by freshets. He advised us to take the carriage-road by Dertona, the Mineral Springs, Crixia and Canalicum. But we thought of the pursuers thundering after us and anyhow we wanted none of Dertona, recalling our encounter with Gratillus at Placentia. We took the coast road, and, though we had to ford two streams and swam our horses over one, although we had to slide down slopes and toil up others afoot, leading our horses after us, although a full third of the road was mere rough track, like a wild mountain trail, though the distance was all of forty-five miles, yet we slept at Vada Sabatia, very thankful to have done in one day what would have taken us at least three by the hundred and fifty-one mile mountain-detour through Dertona, and still more thankful for the lonely safety of the coast road.

From Vada Sabatia the coast road was better, but still far from easy. We were well content to noon at a tiny change-house between Albingaunum and Albintimilium and to sleep at Lumo, seventy-seven miles on. Next morning early, only six miles from Lumo, but six miles of hard climbing up a twisty, rock-cut road, we came out at its crest, where there is a wonderful view up and down the coast and out southwards to sea, and there passed the boundary of Italy and entered Gaul. That night we slept at Matavonium, eighty-four miles forward and but seventy-four miles from Marseilles.

So far we had had no adventures, had been accepted without question everywhere, had seen no look of suspicion from anyone, had encountered no other couriers, except those whom we met and passed on the road, we and they lashing, spurring and hallooing, each party barely visible to the other through the cloud of dust both raised.

On that day, our eighth out from Rome, at noon at Tegulata, we had adventure enough.

The common room of the inn was low-ceiled, I could have jumped and touched the carved beams with my hand. But it was very large indeed, something like thirty yards long and fully twenty yards wide, with two Tuscan columns about ten yards apart in the middle of it, supporting the seven great beams, smoke-blackened till their carving was blurred, on which the ceiling-joists were laid. The floor was of some dark, smooth-grained stone, polished by the feet which had trod it for generations; there were six wide-latticed windows, and, opposite the door, a great fire-place, with an ample chimney above and four bronze cranes for pots or roasts. Each arm had several chains and actually, when we entered, four pots were boiling, and a kid was roasting over the cunningly bedded fire of clear red coals, the fresh caught wood at the back, where the smoke would not disflavor the roasting meat. It was the most civilized inn we had

entered on our post-ride and spoke of the nearness of Marseilles, though every detail of its construction, furnishings and methods was Gallic, not Greek.

Unlike our inns, where the drink and food is set on low, round-topped, one-legged, three-footed tables, about which are placed the backless stools or low-backed, wooden-seated chairs on which the customers sit, it had, Gallic fashion, big, heavy-topped, high-set, rectangular, six-legged tables with benches along their long sides, others with chairs, like those at the ends of every table; solid, high-backed chairs, comfortable for the guests, whose knees were well under the high-topped, solid-legged tables.

Agathemer and I took seats at the table in the far corner to the right of the door; only two of the five were occupied, and they by but two at each; plainly local customers. We told the host that we were in haste and asked for whatever fare he had ready. He brought us an excellent stew of fowl, with bread and wine and recommended that we wait till he had broiled some sea-fish, saying they were small but toothsome, fresh-caught and would be ready in a few moments. The fish tempted us, and, so near Marseilles, we felt no hurry at all, for we meant to loiter on the road and pass the gate about an hour before sunset, calculating that the later in the day we arrived the better chance we had of delivering our despatches, as we must, without being exposed as not the men we passed for, and of somehow disembarassing ourselves of our accoutrements and donning ordinary attire bought at some cheap shop.

As we sat, tasting the eggs, shrimps, and such like relishes before attacking the stew, which was too hot as yet, there entered two men in the attire of Imperial couriers. Agathemer kept his face, but I am sure I turned pale. I expected, of course, that they would walk over to our table, greet us, ask our names, and like as not turn out intimates of Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix, so that we would be exposed then and there.

But they merely saluted, perfunctorily, and took seats at the table nearest the door on their left, diagonally the whole space of the room from us. Agathemer and I returned their salute as precisely as we could imitate it, thankful that they had saluted, so as to let us see what the couriers' salute was, for we had felt much anxiety all along the road, since neither of us, often as we had seen it, could recall it well enough to be sure of giving it properly, if we met genuine couriers, or, terrible thought, encountered an inspector making sure that the service was all it should be and on the outlook for irregularities.

The moment they were at the table they bawled for instant service, urged the host, reviled the slaves, fell on their food like wolves, eating greedily and hurriedly and guzzling their wine. We could catch most of their orders, but of their almost equally loud conversation, since they talked with their mouths full, we caught only the words

"Dertona" and "Crixia"; these comforted us; either they had left Rome before us and we had overtaken them, or they came from Ancona or somewhere on the road from Ancona to Dertona or more likely from Aquileia, or somewhere on the road from it, or perhaps even from beyond it.

They disposed of relishes, boiling stew, a mountain of bread, and a lake of wine, besides olives and fruit, in an incredibly short time, and then, again perfunctorily saluting us, rushed out.

Our fish had just been served and were as good as prophesied. A moment after the exit of the couriers there entered a plump, pompous individual, every line of whose person and attire advertised him a local dandy, while every lineament and expression of his face, his every attitude and movement, equally proclaimed him a busybody.

He walked straight to our table, bowed to us and nodded to one of the slave-waiters, who instantly and obsequiously vanished. Our new table-companion at once entered into conversation with us, speaking civilly, but with an irritating self-sufficiency.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am acquainted with many of your calling who pass through here, but I do not recall having ever seen you before. My estates are near Tegulata and I am chiefly concerned with wine-growing. My wines, indeed, are reckoned the best between Baeterrae and Verona. My name is Valerius Donnotaurus; may I know yours?"

I kept my eyes on his face as I introduced Agathemer as Bruttius Asper and he me as Sabinus Felix. It seemed to me that his expression was not altogether free from a momentary gleam of suspicion; but my anxiety might have seen what was not there, I could not be sure. At any rate he bowed politely, asked me whence we came, when we had left Rome, and the latest news. He commended our speed and our having overcome the difficulties of the coast road between Genoa and Vada Sabatia.

The waiter, according to some subtle characteristic of his nod, brought wine for three, which he assured us was wine from his estates, though not his best, yet worth trying, and he invited us to drink with him. We could not well refuse and we were glad to be able to praise the wine, which, for Gallic wine, was really not so bad. Before we had finished our fish he excused himself and went out.

We dallied with our food, counting on giving the two couriers time to get away before we came out into the courtyard. But we learned afterwards that, as we had shown our credentials and ordered fresh horses before we entered the inn, the change-master would not give them the two best horses which he was holding ready for us and had in the yard no other horses. They had demanded our fresh horses, cursed him and

blustered, but could not move him and so were still berating him when Donnotaurus came out to them. He, after introducing himself, asking their names and route and, commiserating them on the poor supply of horses, had casually inquired whether they were acquainted with two couriers named Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. On their answering that they knew both of them he had chatted a while longer and then asked them to reënter with him the inn's common-room, alleging that they could assist him on an important matter touching the service of the Emperor. According to the change-master, who told us all this later, they had complied in a hesitating and unwilling manner, as if numb and bewildered.

We, dallying over some excellent fruit and the not unpalatable wine, knowing nothing of all this, saw the three reënter together and approach us, the couriers looking not only reluctant, but dazed: up to us Donnotaurus led them.

"Do you know these gentlemen?" he demanded.

"Never set eyes on them in my life," one of them disclaimed. The other nodded.

"I thought so!" Donnotaurus cried. "These men claim to be Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. You say you know Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix. You do not know these men. Therefore they are passing under false names. They are not Imperial couriers, but some of the scoundrels who have been posing as Imperial couriers and using the post-roads for their own private ends. I thank you for assisting me to expose them. It now remains to arrest them!"

I had thought when the two entered first and saluted us that their expression of face was queer; now it was queerer: they looked like some of the deer we had seen in the net-pocket at Spinella, frantic to escape and seeing no way out.

One mumbled something about having barely seen Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix and not being sure that we were not they. But Donnotaurus neither heard nor heeded.

"Here, Tectosax!" he called to the host, "come help us arrest these men!

They are bogus! They are shams! They are not couriers!"

"One man arrest two!" the host demurred.

"I only want your help," Donnotaurus bawled. "Call Arecomus and the ostlers. They can make short work of it."

At this point Agathemer found his voice, and he spoke steadily, coolly and firmly, even with a bit of a drawl.

"Don't do anything you will have to be sorry for," he said. "Better not make any mistake."

At his utterance the two couriers were manifestly even more uncomfortable than before. But Donnotaurus only bawled louder to the host.

"I don't arrest travellers," the host protested, "I feed 'em. Arecomus don't arrest travellers, he horses 'em. Anyhow, there's no magistrate here; talking of arresting is folly.

"And I wish you'd quit your foolishness, Donnotaurus. This is the third row you've started here within six months. You're giving my inn a bad name and ruining my trade. You're my best customer, yourself, but you are more nuisance than all the rest of my customers put together. I'd rather you'd move out of the neighborhood or keep away from my inn than go on with such nonsense. I don't want anybody arrested on my premises or threatened with arrest. And you've nothing to go on in this case, anyhow."

Donnotaurus appeared at a loss, but obstinate and about to insist, when the doors opened and there entered a bevy of staff officers, all green and gold and blue and silver, clustered about a huge man in the full regalia of a general, his crimson plumes nodding above his golden helmet, his crimson cloak dangling about his golden cuirass, his gilt kilt-straps gleaming over his crimson tunic-skirt. There was no mistaking that incredible expanse of face, seemingly as big as the body of an ordinary man, those bleary gray eyes under the shaggy eyebrows, their great baggy lower lids, the heavy cheeks and the vast sweep of russet beard.

It was Pescennius Niger himself!

As he was later proclaimed Emperor and narrowly missed overcoming his competitors and emerging master of the world, the mere encounter has a certain interest. Its details, I think, even more.

Up to us he strode.

"What's all this?" he demanded in his big, authoritative voice. Agathemer and I stood up and saluted.

I expected Agathemer, who knew the value of speaking first, to anticipate Donnotaurus, but he let Donnotaurus give his version of the affair.

"I'm competent to decide this," said Pescennius, "and I shall."

And he eyed us, asking: "What have you two to say?"

"In the first place," said Agathemer, "I ask you to examine our papers."

He took from the seat of his chair, where he had placed it as he stood up, our despatch bag, opened it, and displayed its contents; the package of despatches, our credentials, and the diploma entitling us to change of horses, with the endorsement of each change-master from Centumcellae onwards.

Pescennius examined these meditatively.

"These papers," he said, "are in perfect order. But they do not prove that you are the men named in them though they incline me to believe it. I should believe it, but these men deny that you are Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix."

"And why do they deny it?" Agathemer queried triumphantly. "Why, because they were caught by this busybody and asked whether they knew Bruttius Asper and Sabinus Felix and they said they did; then haled in here by him and confronted with us and asked whether they knew us and of course said they did not, as they did not. And why do they not know us? Because they are not couriers at all, but men passing themselves off as couriers. Our papers are in perfect order, as you say. Ask them for their papers. They haven't any!"

By the faces of the two I saw that Agathemer had guessed right. They, in fact, were impostors. They had no despatches, no credentials, no papers at all, except a diploma with entries from Bononia, through Parma, Placentia and Clastidium to Dertona and so onwards; a diploma so manifestly a clumsy forgery that, at sight of it, I wondered how it had fooled the stupidest change-master.

Pescennius barely glanced at it. To his apparitors, he said:

"Arrest these three!"

In a trice Donnotaurus and the two impostors were seized.

To us he said:

"Gentlemen, I apologize for having doubted you, even for a moment. And I thank you for having so cleverly and quietly exposed these precious gentry. I shall keep an eye on them and on this local meddler; I'll investigate them in Marseilles.

"Meantime I must eat. So I'll remain here. You are in haste and you have eaten. Your horses are ready. I need not detain you. I'll see you at Marseilles tomorrow. I congratulate you on your horsemanship. To have overtaken me, even when I am travelling by carriage, is no mean exploit. I am pleased to have made your acquaintance."

And he bade us farewell, allowed us to pass out, and seated himself at our table.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XIX MARSEILLES AND TIBER WHARF

We rode the first mile at full gallop and then slowed to an easy canter which permitted of conversation. All the way to Calcaria we discussed our situation, prospects and plans. We revised our previous view and agreed that we had best not be too late entering Marseilles, as we might not have time to buy cloaks, hats and footgear, change and get rid of our equipment and find lodgings.

Then again, of course, we fell into a panic at the idea of riding into Couriers' Headquarters and perhaps facing a dozen men who knew Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper as well as we knew each other. We went over, for the tenth time, a series of absurd suggestions and tried to conceive some way by which we might sneak in at some other gate than that to which our road led, might avoid delivering our despatches and might find ourselves safe in ordinary clothes in some obscure lodging.

But we came to the conclusion that, it would be highly suspicious to act otherwise than as genuine couriers would act. There was nothing for it but to ask our way to Couriers' Headquarters, which would not arouse suspicion, since couriers unacquainted with Marseilles must be constantly arriving there, as green or shifted couriers did at all cities; to ride boldly in; to take what came if we were exposed, to deliver our despatches and stroll out for an airing if we had luck.

Even if we had luck so far I could not forecast our being able to buy ordinary clothing and change into it without causing suspicion, investigation, and our arrest and ruin. Agathemer argued that, if Maternus could find, in Rome, a bath where we could bathe without anyone so much as noticing our brand-marks and scourge-scars, he ought to be able to find in wicked, easy-going Marseilles a shop whose proprietor would ask no question except had we the cash. I was palpitating with panic and could foresee in a shopkeeper only an informer, greedy for a reward for our apprehension.

Agathemer asked:

"Didn't I get us out of our troubles at Tegulata?"

"You certainly did!" I replied. "To a marvel."

"Well," he pursued, "I have full confidence in my intuition and my resourcefulness. I feel that I can get us out of our troubles at Marseilles, if you will let me alone and not interfere."

"I certainly won't interfere," I said, "to spoil any chance you think you see. If you see one, signal me and I'll let you use all your dexterity."

After that we rode evenly to Calcaria and even gaily from there to Marseilles, which we entered about two hours before sunset of a mild, fair, delightful afternoon.

The gate-guard took our questions as a matter of course and directed us to Couriers' Headquarters. There we found only one very stupid Gallic provincial in charge, with a few slaves.

"I," said he, "am Gaius Valerius Procillus."

And he fingered the package of despatches, eyeing us meditatively. I quaked, but kept my countenance.

He eyed us yet longer, but made no comment, wrote out a formal receipt for the despatches, handed it to Agathemer and said:

"Munatius will not be back here at Headquarters till tomorrow. So I cannot tell you whether you will have a day or more of rest, which you have earned, or must set off again at once. Nor can I tell you whether, when you do set off, it will be back to Rome, or onward with some of these same despatches to Spain or Britain or Germany.

"Make the most of your time for rest and refreshment. You are free till tomorrow at sunrise. Dromo will show you your quarters."

And he beckoned one of the slaves.

Headquarters was a low rectangle of two stories only, built of some stone like limestone, roofed with red tiles and set about a spacious courtyard. The ground floor seemed mostly stables; but, besides the office in which we had found Procillus, it had other office rooms, a common-room, and we glimpsed a bath and a kitchen. Dromo led us up the stone stair and along the colonnaded portico of the second floor to clean rooms, provided with comfortable cots, chests, stools, and not much else.

We threw our wallets on our cots and sat on stools. As soon as Dromo was gone we opened our wallets, made ourselves comfortable, disposed all our money about us in the

body-belts we had bought at Genoa and went out, unopposed and apparently unremarked.

Through the lively streets of Marseilles, in the mellow glow of the evening sunshine, we made for the harborside, Agathemer nosing the air like a dog on the scent. Presently he remarked:

"We are not far from what I am looking for."

And he turned up a side street to our right. As we took turn after turn each street was less savory and more disreputable than the last till we were in a sort of alley populated it seemed by slatternly trulls and trollops.

"This," said Agathemer, "is the quarter of the town I am after, but not quite the part of it I want."

At the end of the alley he questioned a boy, a typical Marseilles street gamin. The lad nodded and led us still to our right, doubling back. After two or three turns Agathemer was for dismissing him. But the lad insisted on convoying us to some definite destination he had in mind.

Agathemer displayed a coin.

"Take that and get out and you are welcome to it," he said. "If you do not agree to get out and to take it, you get nothing."

The boy eyed his face, took the coin, and vanished.

Unescorted we strolled along a clean street, all whitewashed blank lower walls and latticed overhanging balconies; in the walls every door was fast; through the lattices I thought I discerned eyes watching us.

Ahead of us a lattice opened and two faces looked out. In fact two girls leaned out. Their type was manifest: well-housed, well clad, well fed, luxurious, loose-living, light-hearted minxes.

One was plump, full-breasted, merry-faced, with intensely black and glossy hair, a brunette complexion and in her cheeks a great deal of brilliant color, which I afterwards found was all her own, but which at first I took for paint. She wore a gown of a yellow almost as intense as the garb of the priests of Cybele in the Gardens of Verus. Its insistent yellow was intensified and set off by a girdle of black silk cords, braided into a

complicated pattern, and by shoulder-knots of black silk, with dangling fringes, and by black silk lacings along her smocked sleeves.

Her companion was tall and slender and melancholy faced, her hair a dull reddish-gold or golden-red, her face without color and a bit freckled, her gown of pale blue.

The black-haired girl called:

"You've had a long ride and you deserve recreation and refreshment. Come in. We don't know you two, but we have entertained couriers before this. This is the place for you."

"Ah, my dear," Agathemer replied, "we not only have had a long ride but we may have to set out on a longer tomorrow, and you know the proverb:

"'Light lovers are seldom long lopers.'"

"If you were too much disinclined to being light lovers," the girl retorted, "you'd never be strolling down this street. Come in!"

"My dear," said Agathemer, "we'd love to come in. But remember the proverb:

"'Gay girls are not good for great gallopers.'"

"Oh, hang your proverbs," the girl laughed down at us. "I don't know what you are up to, but I like you. You don't look as austere as you talk. And I don't mind your asceticism. If you don't appreciate the entertainment offered you, you can have any sort of entertainment you prefer. A goblet of wine and an hour's chat won't enervate you or make you less fit. Come in."

A horrible old Lydian woman, one-eyed, obese, clean enough of body and clothing, but a foul old beast for all that, let us in.

Agathemer introduced me as Felix and himself as Asper. The merry dark-haired girl was named Doris and her languorous comrade Nebris. A more garish and gaudy creature than Doris I have never beheld. I was struck with her profusion of jewels, mostly topazes, but also many carbuncles and garnets; rings, bracelets, a necklace, a hair-comb and many big-headed hair pins. Nebris was equally bejewelled with turquoises and opals, but, somehow, they did not glitter like the jewelry on Doris, but partook of their wearer's subdued coloring. As Doris remarked next day:

"Nebris is very graceful and almost pretty; but she was born faded, and nothing can brighten her."

We found the girls housed in as neat, cosy and charming a little nest as heart could wish for. The atrium was tiny, the courtyard was tiny, everything was tiny. But it all had an air which put us at our ease and made us feel at home. Doris, the dark-haired, red-cheeked, full-contoured lass, was plainly much taken with Agathemer and he with her; I always had a weakness for red-headed girls and felt genuinely pleased that Nebris, her long-limbed, long-fingered, pale-skinned, blurred, bleached comrade seemed equally taken with me. The sofas of the tiny triclinium were soft and comfortable and, after eight days in the saddle, without a bath, we were glad to loll on them. The wine was good and, without any effort, the four of us fell into cheerful chatter about nothing in particular. I complimented Doris on her dwelling and its furnishings and she at once insisted on showing us all over it: the kitchen, bath and latrine beyond the tiny courtyard and upstairs a second triclinium, as tiny as that below, and four tiny bed-rooms, with handsomely carved beds, piled with deep, soft feather beds and feather-pillows. Doris and Nebris each had her bed-room furnished to harmonize with her own coloring. I complimented both on their taste.

In Nebris's room Agathemer spied a flageolet.

"Do you play on this?" he asked.

"Sometimes," she said, "but Doris declares that my music makes her melancholy, it's so dismal."

"I'll play you any number of lively tunes," Agathemer promised, possessing himself of the flageolet.

We all went down into the lower triclinium, where we had left the wine, and Agathemer charmed the girls with his music and, indeed, enlivened me as much as them.

After a score of tunes, while our first goblets of wine were not yet emptied, Agathemer said:

"Felix, I believe I see a way out of our troubles."

"Asper," I replied, "I leave it all to you."

"Doris, my dear," said Agathemer, "we are not Imperial Couriers at all."

Doris stared.

"You mean it?" she asked.

"So help me Hercules," said Agathemer solemnly.

"Well," she meditated, with a sharp intake of her breath. "You fooled me. I thought you were genuine. How did you come in this rig?"

"We belong in Rome, both of us," Agathemer began. "How we came in Placentia is no part of the story. But we were in Placentia and we got into trouble. It wasn't serious trouble; we hadn't killed anybody, or stolen anything, or cheated anybody; but it was trouble enough and aplenty and we decided to get out of Placentia. Roads, road-houses, the towns wouldn't have been healthy for us just then, so we took to the mountains. Not as brigands, you understand, but we hadn't much cash and coin will go farther in the mountains than anywhere else; and the weather was fine and we meant to camp out all we could and stay out all summer and let things blow over. It was hot, burning hot and we blundered on a cave, a nice, big, airy dry cave. We went in to cool off and sleep. And we slept sound."

Then he told our entire story, just as it happened, from our capture by Maternus and his band, all down to Rome, into the Gardens of Verus, out along the Aurelian Highway among the tombs, all about the two drunken robbers, in the moonlight, all about our gallop along the coast, all about our encounter with Pescennius Niger.

Nebris kept looking from Agathemer to me, her pale gray eyes wide; but Doris kept her snapping brown eyes on Agathemer's face from his first word to his last.

"My!" she cried, "you have had adventures! Or you are the biggest liar and the cleverest story-teller I ever met. If you invented that story you deserve help as a paragon among improvisators; if you had all those adventures you deserve help ten times over and you certainly need it. Somehow I believe you. I'll help you all I can. You are in the right place."

And she called:

"Mother, tell Parmenio to find Alopex and bring him to me at once. Tell him to be quick."

One of the slaves went out, slamming the door after him.

"Doris," said Nebris, "can you really save these lads?"

"I can!" Doris asserted.

"With Pescennius Niger after them?" Nebris quavered.

"Even with Pescennius Niger after them," Doris declared.

"You must remember," she went on, "that Pescennius told these lads he would not expect to see them till tomorrow morning. That gives me till dark to set things going and till about two hours after sunrise to finish the job. Unless, indeed, messengers announcing the robbery of the real Sabinus Felix and Bruttius Asper happen to overtake Pescennius at Tegulata or between there and Marseilles. Even then he can hardly get on these lads' trail before dark. I think we shall be able to get these lads away safe, no matter what happens. Anyhow let's be cheerful and make the best of things."

And she filled our goblets.

Alopex could not have been far away. Very shortly we heard the door open and shut and a youth came in, whom Doris introduced as Alopex. A more repulsive being I have never seen. He was of medium height, slender, habited in the embroidered, be-fringed garb fashionable among Marseilles dandies, his hair curled and perfumed, his face much like a weasel's, his complexion like cold porridge. I then had my first glimpse of a Marseilles pimp, and I never want to see another. To me he looked capable of any meanness, of any treachery, of any dishonor, of any crime.

"Alopex," Doris commanded, "look these gentlemen, over and take their measure, then go out and buy hats, cloaks, boots and wallets for them, suitable for a sea-voyage, as inconspicuous as possible, durable and water-proof. Get a porter and bring them back with you, in a bag, so no one on the streets will know what the porter is carrying. Be quick."

"Six gold pieces," said Alopex.

"If you spend six gold pieces on that outfit," said Doris, "you are an ass; you shall have six gold pieces, but bring back a reasonable sum in change, after paying the porter."

I gave Alopex six gold pieces and he went out.

"When he comes back," Agathemer asked, "can he pilot us to a bath, where we shall be as safe as Felix was in Rome in the bath which Maternus knew of?"

"He can and he shall," Doris replied. "You two certainly need a bath: and however you are marked by scourges and brands, the marks won't be noticed at the bath to which he will lead you."

"How about a dinner?" Agathemer queried.

"Asper, my dear," said Doris, "you said you had plenty of cash."

"We have," said Agathemer.

"Then," said she, "just give me one of those gold pieces you got from the two drunken robbers and while you are bathing I'll order as fine a dinner as Marseilles affords and have it here ready to serve when you two get back from your bath."

Alopex soon appeared with a complete outfit for us and the prices which he announced appeared reasonable to me and were agreed to by Doris. He handed Agathemer a gold piece and three silver pieces.

"Change," Doris commanded, and we took off our boots and put on those Alopex had brought us. Doris had Parmenio bundle up our couriers' attire, boots and hats and said:

"I hate to see anything wasted. These outfits are going to be found at Couriers' Headquarters and no one will ever suspect how they got there. You can arrange that, Alopex, can't you?"

"Easy as that," said Alopex, snapping his fingers.

"Then you do it," she ordered, "and now take these gentlemen to Sosia's bathhouse and give him the tip that they are all right."

Alopex acceded sulkily but obediently. That bath refreshed me amazingly and Agathemer seemed to enjoy it as much as I did. It was after sunset when we were back with Doris and Nebris, but still far from dark; in fact, light enough to see well.

"Now Alopex," said Doris, briskly, "make your best speed to the harborside and see if you can find a sure ship sailing at dawn, with a captain we can trust, to get these lads out of Marseilles at once. I doubt if you can find one, but do your best."

"We want a ship for Antioch," Agathemer put in.

"Alopex," said Doris, "find a ship to get these lads out of Marseilles at dawn, never mind where it is bound for. Now go. And come back and report, tonight, sure, and as soon as you can."

When he was gone she rounded on Agathemer:

"Asper," said she, "I am ashamed of you. You are a fool. With Pescennius Niger likely after you, foaming at the mouth, raging because he let you slip through his fingers, you talk of picking and choosing a destination? Why lad, it makes no difference where the ship is bound so it is seaworthy, has a captain I can trust and is headed away from Marseilles. The point for you two is to get away from Marseilles quick. Whether you land at Carthage, or even Cadiz, makes no difference. You can reship from anywhere to anywhere, once you are clear of Marseilles. You might linger in Marseilles, under my protection, but for your encounter with Pescennius Niger. But after that there is nothing for you to do but get away quick."

She paused for breath, shaking her finger at us, like a nurse at naughty children.

"And now," said she, "let's get at that dinner. I'm hungry and I'm sure you ought to be."

We were. And the dinner was excellent, much of it unfamiliar. The Marseilles oysters had a flavor novel, odd, not agreeable at first, but very likable after a bit of experience with it. Everything out of the sea was tasty. The main dish was a wonderful stew of fish, for which, Nebris told us, Marseilles was famous. It was flavored with any number of vegetables and relishes, and had bits of meat in it, but fish was the chief ingredient and the blended flavors made it a most appetizing viand.

We ate slowly, had just finished our fruit and Agathemer was playing the flageolet to the accompaniment of enthusiastic applause from both girls when Alopex returned. He reported that no ship could possibly be gotten for us the next morning and vowed that it would likely take him all day to find one for the morning after.

"Then run off, like a good boy," said Doris, "and get a good long sleep so as to be fresh tomorrow. Start before daylight and report to me before noon. Run along."

"How about lodging for us?" Agathemer queried.

Doris half chuckled, half snorted.

"Run along, Alopex," she commanded.

When he was gone she faced Agathemer, arms akimbo.

"Asper," she said, "I'm going to save you two lads, no matter how idiotically you act or talk. I like you, in spite of your ridiculous ascetic airs and your nonsensical assumption of austerity. You can't make me angry nor lose my protection, no matter how rude and chilly you are. If you two don't appreciate the kind of entertainment we are offering you and haven't sense enough and manners enough to accept it and be thankful, you can sleep here anyhow, where and how you prefer. But you don't go out of this house tonight, nor yet tomorrow, not if I know it. I'm going to save you two, in spite of your folly."

Naturally, after that, we stayed where we were.

Next morning, not much more than an hour after sunrise, as we were again enjoying flageolet music from Agathemer, Alopex returned and reported that he had found a clean, roomy, seaworthy ship, captained by a man well and favorably known to him and Doris, which would sail for Rome at dawn next day.

"That's your ship," said Doris to us.

"After what I told you," Agathemer protested, "do you seriously advise us to set sail for Rome?"

"I do," Doris declared. "Any place on earth is healthier for you two than Marseilles. Were you in trouble in Rome before you got into trouble in Placentia?"

"We were," said Agathemer, "and trouble of the deepest dye."

"Asper, my dear," said Doris, "no matter what sort of trouble you were in at Rome, Rome can't be as dangerous for you as Marseilles. And by all I hear, Tiber Wharf is a fine locality in which to hide and Ostia nearly as good. Take my advice and sail. From Rome or Ostia you ought to find it easy to ship for Antioch."

"I believe you," said Agathemer, "but I'd like to have more cash with me than I have and I'd like to give you two girls enough gold pieces to serve as a sort of indication of our gratitude. No gold either Felix or I shall ever possess would be enough to repay you for what you have done for us.

"Now I have an emerald of fair size and of the best water and flawless at that, sewn into the hem of my tunic. Since you are so capable at finding safe shops and baths and ships,

perhaps Alopex could guide me to a gem- expert who would like to buy a fine emerald and who would pay a fair price for it and keep his mouth shut."

"I had not meant you so much as to poke your nose out of doors till tomorrow before sunrise," said Doris, meditatively, "but Pescennius won't be suspicious yet unless a post with news of the robbery you profited by has already reached here. I fancy it will be a safe risk for Alopex to escort you to our gem-expert. He'll pay you an honest three-quarters of the full value of your emerald. Alopex and I get a rake-off on his profits, as we do on the fare of the men we ship out of Marseilles. Gems and fugitives are part of my regular line of trade, with efficient help from Alopex."

Actually Agathemer was gone about two hours and came back with a portly bag of gold pieces. He found us in the triclinium, Nebris lying on the sofa with me, and playing a dismal tune on her flageolet, Doris on the other sofa laughing at us. He lay down by Doris, spilled the gold on the inlaid dining table, divided it into four equal portions, pouched one, made me pouch another, and piled one in Doris's lap, while I similarly piled the other in Nebris's lap.

"Share and share alike," said Agathemer, "and you are welcome to whatever part of his rake-off Alopex turns over to you."

"Asper," said Doris, "you are a dear. Play us a decent tune. Nebris's music makes me doleful."

We spent the day eating, drinking, chatting, napping and listening to Agathemer's very lively music.

For dinner we had another Marseilles fish-stew, entirely different from the former, and entirely different from anything I had ever eaten elsewhere.

Next morning Doris had us all up, bathed as well as we could in her tiny bath, fed and ready to set out long before the first streak of dawn appeared in the east. Agathemer, on his gem-selling expedition, had bought all we needed to line our wallets except food, and that Doris supplied in abundance and variety and of a sort calculated to be palatable two or three days out at sea.

Doris was a creature no man could forget. She was buxom and buoyant and completely content with her home, her way of life, her friends and her prospects; and as capable and competent a human being as I ever met. When Alopex gave his cautious tap on the door and slipped inside she bade us farewell unaffectedly, kissed me like a mother, and gave Agathemer one sisterly hug and one smacking kiss. If there were tears in her eyes none ran down either cheek.

Nebris, on the other hand, wept over me and clung to me, with many kisses.

"There are not many like you," she sobbed. "You are gentle and courteous. Our friends are generous enough, but they drink too much and are boisterous and rough and coarse. I wish you weren't going. But I'm glad I've had you even for so short a time."

And she gave Agathemer her flageolet, holding it out to him with her left hand, her right arm round my neck.

"Come, come!" Doris bustled, "act sensible, child!"

We tore ourselves away and followed our unsavory guide through the dim, foggy streets. I distrusted Alopex and should not have been astonished had he turned us over to a batch of guards, waiting for us at any corner. But he led us to a fine stone quay by which was moored as trig a merchantman as I ever saw, new and fresh painted. Her captain was a bluff, hearty, wind-tanned Maltese, Maganno by name, swarthy, hook-nosed and with a shock of black curls. He counted the gold pieces Alopex gave him and said, in Latin with a strong Punic accent:

"My ship is yours from here to Tiber wharf."

We shook hands on it, went on board and she cast off at once and was out of the harbor before the sun had dispersed the fog. To our surprise we set a course not about southeast as we had expected, but along the coast until we passed Ulbia, and then almost due east. Maganno explained:

"Give me the open sea. You Italians are always for hugging the shore: we Maltese, like our Phoenician ancestors, are all for clear water. I've sailed between Corsica and Sardinia, and once was enough for me. I've made this cruise many times and I always prefer to weather the Holy Cape."

North of Corsica, in fact, we sped, with a fair following wind and we had an unsurpassably fortunate voyage; skies clear, wind always favorable, steady and neither too gentle nor too strong. Our time we spent on deck from before sunrise till long after sunset, dozing through the heat of the day; Agathemer, when awake, playing on his flageolet, more often than he was silent, to the delight of all on board. The crew were mostly Maltese, like their master, using indifferently their own dialect, Greek of a sort and very poor Latin. Maganno's Latin was better than theirs, but all racy with his accent.

When we were already in sight of the mouth of the Tiber he sat down by us and said:

"I was told that you lads were in trouble. But, certainly, you are lucky voyagers. I have sailed from Ostia to Marseilles and from Marseilles to Ostia forty-one times, and this forty-second is the easiest and quickest passage ever I made. I like you lads. Anybody Doris recommends I always help, for her sake. I'll also help you for your own. Tell me your plans and I'll do my best for you."

He agreed with us that both the Northern Harbor and Ostia were certain to be swarming with spies and secret-service agents and informers: so, for that matter, was the harbor-side of Rome along the Tiber: but Rome, being many times as large as Ostia, was likely to be proportionately easier to hide in.

"That's where a small merchantman like mine," said he, "beats any big one. That's why I sail always a small ship, never a big ship. A big merchantman must berth at Ostia or at the Northern Harbor. My ship can sail on up the Tiber to Rome. And I shall. You come on up with me."

His advice seemed good. We decided to stay on the ship all the way up to Rome, and we did, lolling on deck to Agathemer's piping in the mellow sunshine.

So idling we spoke more than once of the Aemilian Sibyl and of this second fulfillment of her acrid prophecy.

Maganno promised to find us a ship loading for Antioch; seaworthy, roomy and with a trustworthy captain.

This could not be done quickly and, he found us, meantime, lodgings with a friend of his, a fat, bald, one-eyed cook-shopkeeper named Colgius, who rented us a tiny room over his eating-room, which was not far from the Ostian Gate, between the public warehouses and the slope of the Aventine.

At his table we fared pretty well, for his prices were low, his wine drinkable, and most of his food eatable, though we did not try a second time the viands for which he had the briskest demand: a very greasy pork stew of which he was inordinately proud, amazingly rank ham, and incredibly strong Campanian cheese; all three of which seemed to delight his customers, who were an astonishing medley of slaves and freemen: porters, stevedores, inspectors' assistants, coopers, mariners, jar-markers, gig-drivers, teamsters, drivers of all sorts of hired vehicles, drovers who herded cattle from Ostia to the cattle-market, vendors of sulphur-dipped kindling-splints, collectors of street filth and others equally low in class, equally novel to me.

Colgius took a fancy to us and undertook to show us Rome. It struck me oddly that, whereas Nona, in every fiber an Umbrian Gaul, and Maternus, who had spent all his life beyond the Alps, had both, at first glance, recognized us for what we were, Roman master and Greek servant, this Roman of the Romans, keen for personal profit, habituated to the sight of men from all ports, accepted us for Gallic provincials, and never suspected that we were anything else.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XX CHARIOTEERING

Sight-seeing in Rome, in the guise of Gallic wastrels, under the tutelage of a harborside slum host, was truly an experience for me after my former station as a nobleman of the Republic, and my ruin and disguise and flight. I positively enjoyed it.

First of all Colgius was for showing us over the stables of the Reds, for he was mad about racing and boasted that he had bet on the Reds since he was six years old and his father gave him his first copper. But I demurred and pointed out that none of the racing-stables were fit places for us, since a steady stream of Spanish horses trickled through Marseilles and on through Vada Sabatia and Genoa to Rome, and there was too great a probability that we might come face to face with some groom, hostler or hanger-on from Marseilles who would know us at sight. Colgius yielded to this argument and agreed that we must avoid all the racing stables. This greatly relieved us, since, while neither I nor Agathemer had been devotees of the sport, both of us had been through all six establishments often enough to be likely to be recognized in any one of them.

Baffled in his first choice and, apparently, in his only choice, Colgius asked us what we wanted to see. I said I wanted most to see a day of racing in the circus, blurting out this rather foolish utterance without reflection, merely because I thought it would seem natural to him. He replied that that would be easy, but that the next racing day was day after tomorrow: what would we like to do today?

I said I wanted first of all to be shown the Temple of Mercury, for I wanted to make an offering to the god.

"Oh, yes," he said, "Mercury is your chief god in Gaul, isn't he, and you put him ahead of Jupiter. What is it you call him?"

"You are thinking of the Belgians," I said, "and of the Gauls in the Valley of the Liger. They call Mercury Tiv or Tir and regard him as their chief god. But we provincials never had any such ideas: we worship the same gods as you, in the same way. But I, personally, while revering Jupiter as king of the gods, have always particularly sought the favor of Mercury."

Off we went to the meat market and I bought there two white hens, as on the day of my flight, more than a year before. With one under each arm I then followed Colgius to the Temple of Mercury and there made my prayers and offering.

When we came out he, of course, began to display the outside of the Great Circus and to tell me of its glories, which, he said, he would show me from the inside the day after tomorrow. The life there was much as Maternus and I had seen it twenty-three days before.

We could not avoid following Colgius about Rome, round the Palatine, the Colosseum and the Baths of Titus and through the Forums of Vespasian, Nerva, Augustus and Trajan. At Trajan's Temple he reiterated his regrets that we dare not go on to the stables of the Reds, and turned back through Trajan's Forum, the Forum of the Divine Julius and the Great Forum. Of course, I was quaking with dread for fear some lifelong acquaintance would recognize me, even in my coarse attire. But none did: in fact I set eyes on no one I knew, except Faltonius Bambilio, who was pompously lecturing ten victims in the Ulpian Basilica. I was certain that his eyes were only on his auditors; the sight of him did not alarm me, he never paid any attention to those he considered his inferiors.

All along Agathemer and I were bursting with suppressed giggles: Colgius paid very little attention to the Palace, the Great Amphitheater, the magnificent public baths, the temples or to any of the glories about us; he was all for cook-shops and hauled us into cook-shops without number, sometimes presenting his Gallic friends, Asper and Felix, to his good friend, the proprietor, sometimes bursting into invectives against the bad cookery, infinitesimal portions or absurd prices of his enemies' establishments. In cook-shops Agathemer and I felt safe, near a cook-shop we felt almost safe, between cook-shops, companioned by Colgius and any cook-shop frequenters we met, we felt more than a little safe. To our thinking no spy, informer or secret service agent would feel suspicious towards Colgius and his friends, nor towards us in their company, and he presented us to idlers, loafers, louts, betting agents, sellers of tips on the races, friends of jockeys, cousins of hostlers and such like to an amazing number.

We found all Rome, as we saw it in the company of Colgius, humming with two names and we made sure that, if they buzzed in such company as we were in they also formed the chief topics of conversation in all parts of the city and at every level of society from the senators down.

One name we had heard when in Rome with Maternus, but had barely heard it; now we heard it everywhere; the name of Palus, the charioteer; Palus, the incomparable jockey; Palus, the king of horsemasters; Palus the chum of Commodus. Both of him, and about him, not only from the men who talked to us, but also from bystanders, diners and

idlers, who never noticed us or knew that we overheard them, we heard the most amazing stories:

He could guide six horses galloping abreast between the test-pillars for tyros driving four-abreast and never jostle a pillar or throw a horse; he had done it time after time; he had won three races, driving seven horses abreast, his competitors driving four abreast; he had won a race, with a team of four Cappodocian stallions, guiding them without reins, by his voice only; he was the most graceful charioteer, bar no one, ever seen in Rome.

As to his origin and personality the stories were not only fantastic, but divergent, contradictory or incompatible.

If we might believe what we heard he had been presented to Commodus by the same nobleman who had presented Murmex Lucro, and on the very next day; he was from Apulia; he was a Roman all his days; he was a Sabine; he was a nobleman in disguise, he had been a foundling brought up in the Subura; he was a half brother of Commodus, offspring of an amour between Faustina and a gladiator, reared in Samnium on a farm, lately recognized and accepted by the Emperor; he was Commodus himself in disguise.

All this, you may be sure, made us prick up our ears. Still more did we at the sound of the other much-banded name. Here again the tales were varied, inconsistent, antagonistic.

But the name!

That name was:

Marcia!

Marcia was in control of Commodus, of the Emperor, of the Republic, of the Empire. She was domiciled in the Palace, she was treated as Empress, she had all the honors ever accorded an Empress except that she never participated in public sacrifices or other ceremonial rituals. Crispina had been divorced and was no longer Empress, but had been relegated, under guard, to a distant island; Crispina was still Empress, but had withdrawn in disdain from the Palatine, occupied the Vectilian Palace on the Caelian Hill, still received Commodus when he visited her, but would not set foot on the Palatine nor take part in any ritual or ceremonial; Crispina had been murdered by Marcia's orders, in her presence, with the Emperor's consent; Marcia got on well with the Empress, there was no jealousy between them, Crispina was glad to have someone who could soothe Commodus in his periodic rages and humor him when he sulked; every

possible variety of story about Crispina was told, but every tale represented Marcia as undisputed and indisputable mistress of the Palace and of everybody in it.

Of her origin we heard mostly versions of the true story; often we heard named Hyacinthus and Ummidius Quadratus, never my uncle nor Marcus Martius. We dared not seem to know anything about Marcia and so could not name Marcus Martius or ask after him. From all the talk we heard, addressed to us or about us, his name was as absent as if he had never existed.

How Marcia came to the Emperor's attention, won his notice, acquired her mastery of him, as to all this we heard not one word: of her complete control of him and of all Rome everyone talked openly.

The next day we escaped the unwelcome attention of Colgius because Maganno came after us to introduce us to the captain who was to take us to Antioch, to show us his ship, and to make sure we knew the wharf at which she lay and how to reach her. The ship was to sail two days later. The captain's name was Orontides, which struck both me and Agathemer as being the same as that of the most fashionable jeweler in Rome, whose grandfather had come from Antioch, where, I suppose, the name would be as natural and frequent as Tiberius with us.

He was a Syrian Greek, with curly brown hair and brown eyes, by no means so wind-tanned and weather-beaten as Maganno, but manifestly a seaman. He was bow-legged and had very large flat feet.

Orontides looked us over, approved us, required a deposit of twenty gold pieces, counted them, said we might pay the rest of his charges at Antioch, and we shook hands on the bargain.

Yet, as the cost of the voyage would land us in Syria with but a few coins, it was well for us that, later in the day, Agathemer found a dealer in gems lately come to Rome and sold him another jewel. This filled our pouches and left us certain of having gold to spare until he could manage to find a purchaser for yet another gem in Antioch or elsewhere.

Colgius, when we returned to our lodgings, talked of nothing but the Games which were to be celebrated next day. He first exhibited the togas which he had hired for us to wear; we, as fugitives, having, of course, no togas of our own. We found them clean and tried them on. Colgius approved and went on with his enthusiasm.

There were to be twenty-four races, all of four-horse chariots only, twelve in the morning, of six chariots, one for each of the racing companies; twelve in the afternoon,

of twelve chariots, two for each of the racing companies. Colgius discoursed at length as to his opinions concerning the six companies, inveighing against the Golds and the Crimsones, declaring that they were rich men's companies, in which only senators and nobles took any interest and the existence of which spoiled racing.

"You never heard of a plain man like me betting on the Crimson or the Gold," he ranted, "all folks of moderate means, all the plain people, all the populace, bet on the Reds, Whites, Greens or Blues. I agree that the Greens are the most popular company, most popular with all classes from the senators and nobles to the poorest, but I will never admit, as many claim, that the Blues have the second place in the affections of the people; the Blues, I maintain, come third and the Reds have second place with all classes. The Whites are a strong fourth. But, as to the Golds and the Crimsones, no one ever lays a wager on them except the enormously rich nobles and senators whose ancestors organized them under Domitian a hundred years ago. But they, being so enormously rich, can buy the best horses and have the best jockeys. Now they have Palus. The Reds have Scopas and the Greens Diocles, and both have been wonderful, but Palus can beat anybody.

"They say he has wagered an enormous sum that he will win all of the twelve races in which he is to run, the first six odd numbers and the last six even numbers, and that he will do so in a previously specified way; that he will take and keep first place in the first race; that, in the others he will, at the start, take second place, third place and so on progressively further back in each, till he lets the whole of five get ahead of him in the eleventh race and the whole field of eleven have the start of him in the last race."

Colgius was afraid Palus would succeed in doing precisely what he purposed. The Reds, if they won any races, must win in those in which Palus did not start. He judged they could not hope to win more than eight of those twelve. He was gloomy.

Next day dawned fair, mild, and with a gentle breeze, perfect weather for spending a day in the Circus. To this Agathemer and I looked forward with some trepidation, for service men, spies and informers were always in all parts of the Circus and one might recognize me. But we comforted ourselves with the hope that they were no longer on the lookout for me. If I knew the ways of secret-service men I conjectured that they would never have been willing to report the truth: that they could find no trace of me, that I had vanished utterly and completely. I would have been willing to wager that, within a month of my disappearance, some corpse somewhere was identified as mine and my suicide reported as verified; which report had probably been accepted at the Palace; whereafter I would be off the minds of all secret-service men everywhere. Therefore I felt reasonably sure that no agent would be on the lookout for me. Of course there was a

chance that one might recognize me by accident. But this was so unlikely that we did not worry over it much.

I was more concerned for fear of arousing suspicion in Colgius by not behaving as he would expect a Gallic Provincial to behave at his first sight of the great games in the Circus Maximus. I could not be sure at what he would expect me to exclaim, what I ought to wonder at and remark on to seem natural in my assumed role of Marseilles scapegrace.

We were a party of eight, Colgius, his wife Posilla, and two teamsters or drovers named Ramnius and Uttius, who conveyed goods or convoyed cattle between Ostia and the markets of Rome. They had their wives with them, but I forget their names. The three women were arrayed in wonderful costumes of cheap fabrics dyed in gaudy hues and adorned with jewelry of gilt or silvered bronze set with bits of colored glass. I had seen such at a distance, but never so close.

Both Agathemer and I liked Ramnius and Uttius; we felt at ease with them at first sight. And they were evidently intimates of Colgius and high in his favor. He and they wore their togas with all the awkwardness to be expected from men who donned togas only for Circus games and Amphitheatre shows. To my amazement I found myself really delighted at again wearing a toga. Like all gentlemen I had always loathed the hot, heavy things. But I found myself positively thrill at being again garbed as befits a Roman on a holiday or at a ceremonial. Besides I found that a toga, over a poor man's tunic, was not nearly so uncomfortable as it was over the more complicated garb of a fashionable person of means and position.

The interior of the Circus, from my novel location, appeared sufficiently strange to lull my dread that I might seem too familiar with it. Of course we were very far back, only five rows in front of the arcade, whereas as long as I was a nobleman of Rome in good standing, I had always sat in the second tier, far forward.

But what made much more difference than sitting far back and high up instead of well forward and low down was that we were on the other side of the Circus from my old seat and almost directly opposite it. I had always sat in section E, about the middle of the east side of the Circus and not far from the Imperial Pavilion in section C. We were in section P, directly facing E, and not far from the judges' stand in section O.

Now from where I had been used to sitting, facing a little south of west, I had viewed only the tiers of seats and of spectators, the upper arcade, and, above that the roofs of the not very lofty, large or magnificent temples on the Aventine Hill. From where we sat with Colgius we faced the Palatine and I was overwhelmed by the vastness, beauty and

grandeur of the great mass of buildings which make up the Imperial Palace. On a festival day, of course, they were exceptionally gorgeous, for every window was garlanded at the top and most displayed tapestries or rugs hung over the sill, every balcony was decorated similarly and with greater care than the windows, and every window, balcony and portico was a mass of eager faces. Especially my eye was caught by the crowd of Palace officials and servants on the bulging loggia built by Hadrian in order to be able to catch glimpses of games when he was too busy to occupy the Imperial Pavilion in the Circus itself. That Pavilion, as yet occupied only by a few guards, I gazed at with mixed feelings.

Colgius put Agathemer next him, then me; beyond me sat Ramnius and his wife and then Uttius and his. But across Posilla we were introduced to two cattle inspectors named Clitellus and Summanus of whom we felt uncomfortably suspicious from the instant we laid eyes on them. They looked to me like secret-service agents and Agathemer nodded towards them, when they were not looking, raised his eyebrows and touched his lips.

I for some time satiated myself with gazing at the Palace, with admiring the wonderful charm of the outlook from this side of the Circus, with revelling in the sense of delight at being again in it, with feasting my eyes on its gorgeousness, on the magnificence of its vastness, of its colonnade, of its costly marbles, of its tiers of seats, of the obelisks, shrines, monuments and other decorations of the spina.

Then, after the upper seats were well packed with commonality, the gentry and nobility began to dribble into the lower tiers and even a few senatorial parties entered their boxes in the front row. I began to peer at party after party, outwardly trying to keep my face blank, inwardly excited at the probability of recognizing many former friends and acquaintances.

The first man I recognized was Faltonius Bambilio, unmistakably pompous and self-satisfied. Although a senator he came early. Later I saw Vedius Vedianus and, far from him, Satronius Satro. Didius Julianus, always the most ostentatious of the senators, was unmistakable even in section B, further from me than any part of the Circus except the left hand starting stalls and their neighborhood.

I looked for Tanno in section D, and early made him out.

But, even after the equestrian seats and senatorial boxes had all filled, nowhere could I descry any feminine shape at all suggestive of Vedia. I was still peering and sweeping the senatorial seats with my eyes, hoping to espy her, when the bugles announced the Emperor's approach and the audience stood up. My eyes were on the Imperial Dais

watching for the appearance of the Emperor. But when he came into sight, and I joined in the cheers, I viewed without emotion this man, who had honored me with his favor, yet who had credited to the utmost, without investigation, my inclusion among the number of his dangerous enemies. I reflected that no man accused of participating in a conspiracy against any Prince of the Republic had ever been given any sort of hearing or his friends allowed to try to clear him.

I used all my powers of eyesight to con the Emperor, distinctive in his official robes but too far off to be seen well. He appeared to me to have lost something of his elegance of carriage and grace of movement. He seemed less elastic in bearing, less springy of gait. There was, even at that distance, something familiar in his attitude and stride, but it did not seem precisely the presence of Commodus as I had known him. I stared puzzled and groping in my mind. But I felt no emotion as I stared and peered at him.

Oddly enough, from the moment when I received Vedia's letter of warning until I caught sight of the head of the procession about to enter the Circus through the Procession gate, I had had not one instant of despondency or of self-pity. But, at sight of the head of that magnificent procession, a sort of wave of misery surged through me and inundated me with a sudden sense of wistful regret for all that I had lost and also with an acute realization of the precarious hold I had on life, of the peril I was in from hour to hour. This unexpected and unwelcome dejection possessed me until the whole line of floats displaying the images of the gods had passed and the racing chariots came along.

The very first of these drawn by a splendid team of four dapple grays, was driven by a charioteer wearing the colors of the Crimsons' Company. I did not need to hear the exclamation of Colgius:

"There is Palus! That is Palus!" to recognize this Prince of Charioteers. The descriptions I had heard were enough to have told me who he was. For at even a distant sight of him I did not wonder at the tales which gave out that he was a half brother of Commodus, or Commodus in disguise. He was more like Commodus than any half brother would have been likely to have been; like as a twin brother, like enough to be actually Commodus himself. He had all Commodus' comeliness of port and refinement of poise. Every attitude, every movement, was a joy to behold. I stared back and forth from this paragon in a charioteer's tunic to the stolid lump on the Imperial throne, perplexed at the enigma, feeling just on the verge of comprehension, but baffled. I kept gazing from one to the other till Palus rounded the further goal and was largely hidden by the posts, the stand for the bronze tally-eggs, the obelisk and the other ornaments of the spina.
[Footnote: See Note G.]

There were about two hundred chariots, for very few teams were entered to race twice. More than a third were driven by charioteers, the rest by grooms, or others, quite competent to control them at a walk, though some of the more fiery had also men on foot holding their bits.

"Felix," Agathemer queried, "did you notice anything peculiar about the first chariot?"

"Yes, Asper," I replied, "I did. I never saw a chariot with its wheels so close together, nor with such long spokes. Its axle is higher from the ground than any I ever set eyes on."

"I recall," said Agathemer, "hearing you recount a lecture on chariot- design you once heard from a man of lofty station."

"The design of that chariot," I replied, "certainly tallies with the design advocated in that lecture. It would seem to indicate that Palus has accepted the views of that very distinguished lecturer."

"Perhaps," said Agathemer drily. "Perhaps it indicates something more notable."

"Perhaps," I admitted.

Most of the teams were white or dapple gray, those being the favorite colors of all the racing companies except the Whites themselves, among whom it was a tradition that teams of their racing-colors were unlucky for them. Next most frequent were bays, then sorrels, while roans and piebalds, as usual, were distinctly scarce. In fact there were but three teams of roans, all with the white colors, and two of piebalds, one belonging to the Greens and one to the Blues. The Blue team caught my eye, even at so great a distance. When it came opposite us I nudged Agathemer and queried:

"Asper, did you ever see any of these horses before?"

"Yea, Felix," he replied. "You are quite right in your judgment; the left- hand yoke-mate is the very stallion you are thinking of, which you and I have seen and handled before to-day. You and I know where you rode him and how he passed out of your ken."

It was, in fact, the trick stallion I had ridden at Reate fair and won as a prize of my riding him, which had been spirited away from my stables not many nights after he came into my possession. At once I foresaw some attempt at altogether unusual trickery in the course of this racing-day. The team of four splendid piebald stallions, about five years old, was one of the few entered for two races. I could not conjecture how a horse which had spent his youth as trick-horse in possession of an itinerant fakir, had acquired, since

I knew him, reputation enough to be yoke-mate in a team highly enough thought of to be entered for two races the same day in the Circus Maximus. This was a puzzle almost as absorbing as the likeness and contrast between the Emperor and Palus.

The racing had many remarkable features, but I am concerned to relate only those in which Palus took part.

At once after the procession he drove in the first race, always a perilous honor. When we saw the chariots dart out of the starting-stalls, the Crimson emerged from the stall furthest to the left, just that which is the worst possible position from which to start. Although thus handicapped the Crimson seemed a horse-length ahead before the other chariots had cleared the sills of their stalls and a full chariot-length ahead before it reached the near end of the spina wall. We saw Palus take the wall easily and hold it throughout the race, after the first turn never less than two full chariot-lengths ahead of the Green, which came second. The Red was third, which comforted Colgius a little. As Palus passed the judges' stand he threw up an arm, with a gesture so boyish, so debonair, so graceful, so altogether characteristic of Commodus, that I felt a qualm all over me. And a second gesture of exultation as he vanished through the Gate of Triumph was equally individual.

The Red won the second race, which put Colgius, Uttius and Ramnius in high good humor and seemed to make their fat, smiling wives even more smiling.

Agathemer and I agreed that the rumors retailed by Colgius concerning the wager said to have been made by Palus were probably correct; for he did just what that rumor specified and so singular and spectacular a series of feats could hardly have been fortuitous. It was quite plain that he pulled in his team in the third race, and let a Gold team get the lead of him and keep it till five eggs and five dolphins had been taken down by the tally-keepers' menials and there were but two full laps to run. Then he took the lead easily in the middle of the straight and won by four full lengths.

So of the other races in which he drove. He pulled in his team at the start and each time allowed to get ahead of him one more team than in his last race. Then he joyously and without apparent effort passed first one, in one straight, then another in another, varying his methods from race to race, watching for and seizing his opportunities, biding his time, dashing into top speed as he chose, all smoothly and in perfect form.

The Blue team of piebalds with my trick-stallion among them won the fourth race in which Palus did not compete.

The eleventh race, in which Palus let the whole field of five precede him, was most exciting, especially because of the length of lead he gave even to the fifth team, and the impression of inevitableness about his victory afterwards. The thirteenth, in which he did not drive, was notable for an appalling smash-up of five chariots, in which three jockeys were killed and eight horses killed outright or so badly injured that the clearing-crew had to put them out of their agonies.

The fourteenth race would have been spoiled by an even worse massacre had it not been for the superlative skill of Palus and his amazing luck. He had passed five of the seven chariots which had the lead of him at the start and was a close third to the two Blue teams, with the entire field well up behind, three abreast, mostly, bunched up in a fashion which seldom happens. The whole dozen had gathered way after the tenth turn, as they came up the straight past the judges and us on the first lap, while two eggs and two dolphins still remained on the tally stands. Two thirds up the straight, just when all twelve teams were at their top speed, the Blue chariot furthest out from the spina wall swerved to the right as if the jockey had lost control of his team. Palus lashed his four and they increased their speed as if they had been held in before and darted between the two Blues. As the twelve horses were nose to nose the outer Blue pulled sharply inward in a way which appeared certain to pocket Palus and wreck his team and chariot, but even more certain to wreck the swerving Blue. What Palus did I was too far off to see, but the roar of delight from the front rows, which spread north, south and west till it sounded like surf in a tempest, advertised that he had done something superlatively adequate. Certainly he slipped between the two Blue teams and won his race handily, as he did every other in succession, though eight, nine, ten and eleven chariots led him at the start of each in succession.

"What do you think of that, Asper?" I asked Agathemer.

"Felix," he replied, "there has never been but one man on earth who could manage horses like that. I've seen him do it. I've been smuggled in to watch him, like many another servant supposed to be waiting for his master outside. I recognize the inimitable witchery of him."

"No need to name him," I said. "But if you are right, who is wearing his robes and occupying his usual seat to-day?"

"Don't ask me!" Agathemer replied. "But you yourself, Felix, who have seen him drive so much oftener than I have must agree with me about Palus."

I was mute.

I never saw a better managed racing-day. The first twelve races of six chariots each were over and done with more than an hour before noon and we had plenty of time to eat the abundant lunch Posilla and her two friends had put up for us, to drink all we wanted of the wine served in the tavern in the vault to the left of the entrance stair, underneath the seats of our section, and to return to our seats, refreshed like the rest of that fraction of the spectators which went out and came back, most of them sitting tight in their seats, unwilling to miss any of the tight-rope- walking, jugglers' tricks, fancy riding and rest of the diversions which filled up the noon interval. Also the twelve afternoon races of twelve chariots each were so promptly started, with so little interval between, that the last race was run a full two hours before sunset, while the light was still strong; stronger, in fact, than earlier in the day, for a sort of film of cloud had mitigated the glare of noon, while by the start of the last race the sky was the deepest, clearest blue and the sun's radiance undimmed by any hindrance.

That last race! Palus passed nine competitors in ten half laps, and, in the first half of the sixth lap, was again third to two Blue teams one of which was the piebald team with the Reate trick-stallion as left-hand yoke-mate. Again, as in the fourteenth race, the field was close up, widespread, bunched, and thundering at top speed. Palus was driving the dapple grays with which he had won the first race.

Now, what happened, happened much quicker than it can be told, happened in the twinkling of an eye. The inner leading Blue team apparently hugged the spina wall too close and jammed its left-hand hub-end against the marble, stopping the chariot, so that the axle and pole slewed and so that the horses, since the pole and the traces did not snap, were brought nose on against the wall and piled up horridly, just at the goal-line, opposite the judges stand, and falling so that as they fell they straightened out the pole and brought the chariot to a standstill with its axle neatly across the course.

The other Blue, with the piebalds, was not close in to the leaders, but fairly well out and about a length behind. As the wall-team piled up something happened among the free-running piebalds. Of course, I conjecture that the trick-stallion threw himself sideways at a signal. But it seems incredible that a creature as timid as a horse, so compellingly controlled by the instinct to keep on its feet, should, in the frenzy of the crisis of a race, while in the mad rush of a full-speed gallop, obey a signal so out of variance with his natural impulse. Agathemer vows he saw the trick-stallion throw himself against the chief horse while he and the other two were running strong and true. I did not see that; I only saw the four piebalds go down in a heap in front of their chariot, saw the chariot stop dead, saw, even at that distance, that its axle was perfectly in line with the axle of the other wrecked chariot, both chariots right side up and too close together for any chariot to pass between them.

Palus, skimming the sand not three horse lengths behind the piebalds, was trapped and certain to be piled up against the wrecked Blues, under three or four more of the field thundering behind him.

Actually, at that distance, I saw his pose, the very outline of his neck and shoulders, express not alarm but exultation. Although his right ear and part of the back of his head was towards me, I could almost see him yell. I could descry how the lash of his whip flew over his team, how craftily he managed his reins.

Right at the narrow gap he drove. In it his horses did not jam or fall or stumble or jostle. The yoke-mates held on like skimming swallows, the trace-mates seemed to rise into the air. I seemed to see the two wheels of his chariot interlock with the two wheels of the upright, stationary wrecked chariots, his left-hand wheel between the chariot-body and right-hand wheel of the chariot on his left, his right-hand wheel between the chariot-body and left-hand wheel of the chariot on his right.

Certainly I saw his chariot, with him erect in it, rise in the air, saw it bump on the ground beyond the two stationary chariots, saw it leap up again from its wheels' impact upon the sand, all four of his dapple grays on their feet and running smoothly, saw him speed on and round the upper goal-posts.

As Palus came round the next lap, well ahead of the diminished field, he craftily avoided the heap of wreckage. As he won he dropped his reins altogether, threw up both, arms, and yelled like a lad. As he vanished through the Triumphal Gateway, he again dropped his reins, left his team to guide themselves, and turned half round to wave an exultant farewell to the spectators.

"What do you think, Asper?" I asked Agathemer.

"Felix," said he, "I wouldn't bet a copper that the occupant of the throne is not Commodus. But I'll wager my amulet-bag and all it contains that Palus is not Ducconius Furfur."

He said it under his breath, that I alone might hear.

"My idea, precisely, Asper," I replied.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. II BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXI MISADVENTURES

As we left the Circus I heard in the crowd near us, along with fierce denunciations of the Crimsons and Golds, execrated by all the commonality as merely rich men's companies, the most enthusiastic laudations of Palus and expressions of hopes that the Blues, Greens, Reds or Whites, according to the preference of the speaker, might yet win him over and benefit by his prowess.

Colgius, although the Reds had won but five races, was in a high good humor and insisted on the whole party coming in to a family dinner. The three wives occupied the middle sofa, while Agathemer and I had the upper all to ourselves. The fare was abundant and good, with plenty of the cheaper relishes to begin with; roast sucking-pig, cold sliced roast pork, baked ham, and veal stew for the principal dishes, with cabbage, beans and lentils; the wine was passable, and there was plenty of olives, figs, apples, honey and quince marmalade.

The women talked among themselves and the men, with us putting in a word now and then, of Palus. They argued a long time as to just what he did in the fourteenth race and how he had saved himself at the critical moment. As to his victory in the last race, all three of them were loud in their praises. Colgius said:

"Nothing like that has ever happened before. The chariot which Palus drove had the shortest axle I ever saw or anybody else. No other chariot but that could have passed between the two wrecked chariots; any other would have crashed its two wheels against the wrecked chariot-bodies and would have smashed to bits. His chariot was so narrow that its wheels passed between the two chariot-bodies, clear.

"Even so any other chariot would have stopped dead when its wheels hit the axles of the stalled chariots, for it was plain that his wheels interlocked with the wheels of the stalled chariots and hit the axles. But his chariot had the longest spokes ever seen in Rome, or, I believe, anywhere else, and so had the tallest wheels ever seen and had its axle higher above the sand than any other chariot; so its wheels engaged the stalled axles well below their hub-level and so the team pulled them right over the axles and on."

"Yes," said Uttius, "but that never would have happened but for Palus' instantaneous grasp of the situation and lightning decision. Any other charioteer would have reined in or tried to swing round to the right; he lashed his team and guided them so perfectly

that, with not a hand's- breadth to spare anywhere, the two wheels passed precisely where there was the only chance of their passing, and he guided his horses so perfectly that the yoke-mates shot between the stalled wheels without jostling them or each other. No man has ever displayed such skill as Palus."

"Nor had such luck," Ramnius cut in. "No man could have guided the yoke- mates as he did and, at the same time, exerted any influence whatever on the trace-mates. They showed their breed. Each saw the stalled wheel in front of him, neither tried to dodge. Each went straight at that wheel, reared at it, and leapt it clean. As they leapt they were not helping to pull the chariot, the yoke-mates pulled it over the stalled axles. But the momentary check as the chariot hit the axles and leapt up gave the leaping trace-mates just the instant of time they needed to find their feet and regain their stride. The whole thing was a miracle; of training, of skill and of luck."

"But don't forget," said Colgius, "that the skill and judgment Palus displayed counted for more than the breed of his team and his luck. Do not forget the perfect form he showed: not an awkward pose, not a sign of effort, not a hint of anxiety; self-possession, courage, self-confidence all through and the most perfect grace of movement, ease, and suggestion of reserve strength. He is a prodigy."

After Agathemer and I were alone in the dark on our cots we whispered to each other a long time.

"Do you really believe," I said, "that Commodus is so insane about horse- racing as to be willing to put Furfur on his throne in his robes so that he can degrade himself under the name of Palus?"

"I do," said Agathemer. "No other conjecture fits what we saw. The man on the throne was certainly the image of Commodus, but had not his elegance of port and grace of movement. Palus has all the inimitable gracefulness which Commodus displayed when driving teams in the Palace Stadium."

"He is incredibly stupid in undervaluing and failing to prize his privileges as Emperor," I said, "and amazingly reckless in allowing anyone else to occupy his throne, wearing his robes."

"He is yet more reckless to race as he does," Agathemer commented, "and I should not be astonished if we have seen his last public appearance as a charioteer."

"Why?" I queried startled.

"Because," said Agathemer, "he must be incredibly stupid not to perceive, now, what opportunities the Circus offers for getting rid of an Emperor posing as a charioteer.

"A stupider man than Commodus can possibly be should be able to comprehend that there must have been a very carefully planned plot in the Blue Company, a plot which must have cost a mountain of gold to carry so far towards success, a plot which never would have been laid for a mere jockey, however much his rivalry threatened the Company's winnings and prestige. Only a coterie of very wealthy men could have devised and pushed it. It cost money to induce charioteers to come so close to almost certain death in order to compass the destruction of another charioteer. It cost money to sacrifice a company's teams in that fashion. Such a plot was never laid to get rid of Palus the jockey; it was aimed at ridding the nobility of an Emperor they fear and hate, however popular he may be with the commonality.

"I miss my guess if there is not a violent upheaval in the Blue Company, and if there is not an investigation scrutinizing the behavior and loyalty of every man affiliated with them, from their board of managers down to the stall-cleaners. I prophesy that the informers, spies and secret-service men will have fat pickings off the Blues for many a day to come. I'll bet the guilty men are putting their affairs in order now and hunting safe hiding-places. Commodus may be insane about horse-racing and fool enough to put a dummy Emperor in his place, so he can be free to enjoy jockeying, but he is no fool when it comes to attempts at assassination. He'll run down the guilty or exterminate them among a shoal of innocents."

I agreed.

But I added:

"What is the world coming to when the Prince of the Republic prizes his privileges so little that he neglects state business for horse-jockeying, when he is so crazy over charioteering that he lets another man wear his robes and occupy his throne? It is a mad world."

Next morning we were early on Orontides' ship and once more Agathemer charmed a crew with his flageolet.

At Ostia Orontides found he must lay over for some valuable packages consigned to a jeweler at Antioch for the conveyance of which he was highly paid. He suggested that, as the day was hot for so late in the year, we go ashore and see the sights which, indeed, we found well worth seeing, for Ostia has some buildings outmatching anything to be found outside of Rome. We took his hint, but he warned us:

"I have some sailors I don't trust. Don't leave anything aboard. Take your wallets with you."

We passed a pleasant, idle day, lunching and taking our siesta at an inn outside the Rome Gate. We had planned to dine at an inn near the harbor- front, on the west side of the town, not far from the Sea Gate: there we had barely sat down and begun tasting the relishes, when in came Clitellus and Summanus. They seemed surprised and pleased to recognize us, greeted us as if we had been old friends and close intimates, appeared to assume that we were as glad to see them as they were to see us, and, as a matter of course, joined us at dinner, telling the waiter-boy to bring them whatever we had ordered, only doubling the quantity of every order.

They talked of the races we had seen, of Palus, of his driving; of the smash-ups, of Posilla, of Colgius and of everything and anything. They announced that they would accompany us to our ship and see us safe aboard. Both Agathemer and I more than suspected that they had associates in waiting to follow them and, at a signal, fall on us and seize us. I felt all that and Agathemer whispered to me a word or two in Greek which advised me of his suspicions.

We prolonged our meal all we could, but there was no shaking them off. Agathemer ordered more wine, Falernian, and had it mixed with only one measure of water. Watching his opportunity he threw at me, in a whisper, two Greek words which advised me, since they were the first in a well- known quotation from Menander, that our only hope was to drink our tormentors dead drunk.

It turned out to be a question whether we would drink them drunk or they us. Certainly they showed no hesitation about pouring down the wine as fast as it was mixed and served, nor did either of them appear to notice that we drank less than they; they seemed able to hold any amount and stay sober and keep on drinking. As dusk deepened and the waiter-boys lit the inn lamps, I found myself perilously near sliding off my chair to the floor and very doubtful whether, if I did, I should be able to get up again or to resist my tendency to go to sleep then and there.

I was, in fact, just about to give up any attempt to resist my impulse to collapse when Summanus collapsed, slid to the floor, rolled over, spread out and snored.

Clitellus thickly objurgated his comrade and all weak-heads, worthless fellows who could not drink a few goblets without getting drunk. To prove his vast superiority and his prowess, he poured more wine down his throat, spilling some down into his tunic.

Agathemer winked at me and fingered the strap of his wallet. I groped for mine and fumbled at it.

Clitellus, with a hiccough, slid to the floor beside Summanus.

I was for trying to rise.

"Let us be sure," said Agathemer in Greek, "perhaps they are pretending to be drunk, just to catch us."

But, after a brief contemplation of the precious pair, we concluded that no acting could be as perfect as this reality. They were drunk at last and safely asleep.

Agathemer paid the whole amount, for all four of us, adjured the waiter- boy to be good to Clitellus and Summanus, gave him an extra coin, and signalled me to rise. I lurched to my feet, swaying, almost as drunk as our victims and beholding Agathemer swaying before me, not only because of my blurred eyesight, but also because of his unsteadiness on his feet.

We almost fell, but not quite. Somehow we staggered to the door, where, once outside, the cool night air made us feel almost sobered, though still too nearly drunk to be sure of our location or direction.

More by luck than anything else we took the right turn and found the harbor front before the night was entirely black. In the half gloom we tried to find the pier from which we had come that morning. As we explored we heard a cheerful hail.

"Is that you, Orontides?"

Agathemer called.

"Aye, Aye!" came back the cheery answer. "Come aboard!"

And we were met and assisted up the gang-plank and down over the bulwarks.

"I was afraid you boys were lost," the shipmaster said, "and I am to sail at dawn, after all; everything is aboard. I'm glad to see you. You've dined pretty liberally. Come over here and get to sleep."

And he led us to where we found something soft to sleep on.

I was asleep almost as soon as I lay down.

I awoke with a terrific headache and an annoying buzzing in my ears, awoke only partially, not knowing where I was or why and without any distinct recollections of recent events. My first sensation was discomfort, not only from the pain of my headache, but also from the heat of the sunrays beating on me, and that despite the fact that I could feel a strong cool breeze ruffling my hair and beard.

I sat up and looked about me. Agathemer was snoring. The sun was not low; in fact, at that time of the year, it was near its highest. I had slept till noon!

Then, all of a sudden I realized that the ship was wholly strange to me and that it was headed not southeast, but northwest. That realization shocked me broad awake. At the same instant I saw the shipmaster approaching. He was not Orontides, nor was he at all like him. He had small feet, was knock-kneed, tall, lean, had a hatchet-face and red hair.

"Awake at last!" he commented. "You lads must have dined gloriously last night. You don't look half yourselves, yet."

He stared at me, and at Agathemer, who had waked, into much the same sort of daze in which I had been at first.

"Neptune's trident!" the shipmaster exclaimed. "You two aren't the two lads I was to convoy! Who are you and how did you get here?"

"We were hunting for our ship after dark," Agathemer said, "and somebody hailed us. We asked whether it was Orontides and the answer that came back was: 'Aye, Aye!' We were pretty thoroughly drunk and were glad to be helped aboard and shown our beds. That's all I know."

"Kingdom of Pluto!" the shipmaster cried, "my name's Gerontides, not Orontides. I heard your question, but you were so drunk I never knew the difference: probably I shouldn't have known the difference if you had been sober. I was on the lookout for two lads much like you two who had part paid me to carry them to Genoa. They'll be in a fix."

"'Bout ship," said Agathemer, "and put back to Ostia. You can't be far on your way yet. We'll pay you what you ask to set us ashore at Ostia."

"I wouldn't 'bout ship," said Gerontides, "for twenty gold pieces."

"We'll pay you thirty," said Agathemer.

"Don't bid any higher, son," Gerontides laughed. "If you were made of gold, to Genoa you go. I've a bigger stake in a quick landing at Genoa than any sum you could name would overbalance. Best be content!"

And content we had to be, no arguments, no entreaties, nothing would move him.

"I'll be fair with you," he said. "The lads I took you for had paid me all I had asked them except one gold piece each on landing at Genoa. That's all you'll have to pay me."

Nothing would budge him from his resolution. Agathemer in despair drowned his misery in flageolet playing. It seemed to comfort him and certainly comforted me. The crew were delighted. After a voyage as easy and pleasant as our cruise with Maganno, we landed on the eighth day before the Ides of September, at Genoa, paid our two gold pieces and set about getting out of that city as quickly as might be. We avoided, of course, the posting-station where we had changed horses while in couriers' trappings. But there was a posting-station at each gate of Genoa and we, having talked over all possibilities in the intervals of flageolet playing, were for Dertona. We had little trouble in buying a used travelling-carriage. Horses we did not have to wait long for, as hiring teams were luckily plentiful that day and Imperial agents scarce. Off we set for Milan.

We were in haste but there was no hurrying postillions on those mountain roads. We nooned at some nameless change-house and were glad to make the thirty-six miles to Libarium by dusk. The next day was consumed in covering the thirty-five miles to Dertona. From there on we travelled, in general down hill, and so quicker, but not much quicker, so that a third day entire was needed for making the fifty-one miles to Placentia.

Placentia, a second time, was unlucky for us. It might have been worse, for we did not again encounter Gratillus, or anyone else who might have recognized me. But I made a fool of myself. I am not going to tell what happened; Agathemer never reproached me for my folly, not even in our bitterest misery; but I reproached myself daily for nearly three years; I am still ashamed of myself and I do not want to set down my idiotic behavior.

Let it suffice, that, through no fault of Agathemer's, but wholly through my fault, we were suspected, interrogated, arrested, stripped, our brand-marks and scourge-scars observed and ourselves haled before a magistrate. To him Agathemer told the same tale he had told to Tarrutenus Spinellus. It might have served had we been dealing with a man of like temper, for travellers from Aneona for Aquileia regularly passed through

Placentia turning there from northwest along the road from Aneona to northeast along the road to Aquileia.

But Stabilius Norbanus was a very different kind of man.

"Your story may be true," he said, "but it impresses me as an ingenious lie. If I believed it I'd not send men like you, with their records written in welts on their backs, with any convoy, no matter how strict, on the long journey to Aquileia, on which you'd have countless opportunities of escape. I do not believe your tale. Yet I'll pay this much attention to it: I'll write to Vedius Aquileiensis and ask him if he owned two slaves answering your descriptions and lost them through unexplained disappearance or known crimping by Dalmatian pirates at about the time you indicate.

"Meantime I'll commit you to an ergastulum [Footnote: See Note H.] where you'll be herded with your kind, all safely chained, so that no escape is possible, and all doing some good to the state by some sort of productive labor. A winter at the flour-mills will do you two good."

Our winter at the mills may have benefited us, but it was certainly, with its successor at similar mills, one of the two most wretched winters of my life. And Agathemer, I think, suffered every bit as acutely as I. We were not chained, except for a few days and about twice as many more nights; as soon as the manager of the ergastulum felt that he knew us he let us go unchained like the rest of his charges.

This was because of the structure of the ergastulum. It was located in the cellars of one of the six or more granaries of Placentia, which has, near each city gate, an extensive public store-house. The granary under which we were immured was that near the Cremona gate. Above ground it was a series of rectangles about courtyards each just big enough to accommodate four carts, all unloading or loading at once. It was everywhere of four stories of bin-rooms, all built of coarse hard-faced rubble concrete. The cellars were very extensive, and not all on one level, being cunningly planned to be everywhere about the same depth underground. Where their floor-levels altered the two were joined by short flights of three, four or five stone steps, under a vaulted doorway, in the thick partition walls.

Each cellar-floor was about four yards below the ground level so that a tall man, standing on a tall man's shoulders, could barely reach with his outstretched fingers the tip of the sill of one of the low windows. These windows, each about a yard high and two yards broad, were heavily barred with gratings of round iron bars as thick as a man's wrist, set too close together for a boy's head to pass between them, and each two bars hot-welded at each intersection, so that each grating was practically one piece of

wrought iron, made before the granary was built and with the ends of each bar set deep in the flinty old rubble concrete. The inmates need not be chained, as no escape was possible through the windows, though raw night air, rain, snow at times and the icy winter blasts came in on us through them.

Similarly no escape was possible up the one entrance to the cellars, which was through an inner courtyard, from which led down a stone stair with four sets of heavy doors; one at the bottom, one at each end of a landing lighted by a heavily barred window, and one at the top. Between the inner and outer courtyard were two sets of heavier doors and two equally heavy were at the street entrance of the outer courtyard. On the stair-landing was the chained-up porter-accountant seated under the window on a backless stool by a small, heavy accountant's table on which stood a tall clepsydra by his big account-book. Checking the hours by the clepsydra, he entered the name of every human being passing, up or down that stair, even the name of the manager every time he came in or went out. By him always stood a wild Scythian, armed with a spear, girt with a sabre, and with a short bow and a quiver of short arrows hanging over his back. Similar Scythians guarded the doorways, a pair of them to each door. The slide by which the grain was lowered into the ergastulum, the other slide by which the flour, coarse siftings and bran were hauled up, were similarly guarded. Escape was made so difficult by these precautions that, while I was there, no one escaped out of the three hundred wretches confined in the ergastulum.

There we suffered sleepless nights in our hard bunks, under worn and tattered quilts, tormented by every sort of vermin. Swarming with vermin we toiled through the days, from the first hint of light to its last glimmer, shivering in our ragged tunics, our bare feet numb on the chilly pavements. We were cold, hungry, underfed on horribly revolting food, reviled, abused, beaten and always smarting from old welts or new weals of the whip-lashes.

It was all a nightmare: the toil, the lashings, if our monotonous walk around our mill, eight men to a mill, two to each bar, did not suit the notions of the room-overseer; the dampness, the cold, the vermin, the pain of our unhealed bruises, the scanty food and its disgusting uneatableness.

The food seemed the worst feature of our misery. So, in fact, it appears to have seemed to our despicable companions. Certainly, of the food they complained more than of the toil, the cold, the vermin, the malignity of the overseers or even of the barbarity of the Scythian guards. Anyhow their fury at the quality of their food brought to me and Agathemer an alleviation of our misery. For some hotheaded wretches, goaded beyond endurance, jerked the bars of their mill from their sockets and with them felled, beat to death and even brained the cook and his two assistants.

After their corpses had been removed, the floor swabbed up and the murderers turned over to the gloating Scythians to be done to death by impalement, Scythian fashion, with all the tortures Scythian ferocity could devise, the manager went from cellar to cellar, all through the ergastulum, enquiring if any prisoner could cook. No one volunteered, and, when he questioned more than a few, everyone denied any knowledge of cookery.

A second time he made the tour of his domain, promising any cook a warm tunic, a bunk with a thick mattress and two heavy quilts, all the food he could eat and two helpers; the helpers to have similar indulgences. On this second round, in our cellar, a Lydian, nearer to being fat than any prisoner in the ergastulum, admitted that he could make and bake bread, but vowed that he could not do anything else connected with cooking. Spurred on by his confession and tempted by the offers of better clothing and bedding and more food, also by the memories of Agathemer's cookery the winter before, I blurted out that Agathemer could not make bread, but could do everything else needed in cookery. Agathemer, after one reproachful glance at me, admitted that he was a cook of a sort, but declared that he was almost as bad a cook as the wretch just murdered. The overseer bade him go to the kitchen and told him he might select a helper; the baker would have been the other helper. As helper Agathemer, naturally, selected me.

After that we suffered less. The slaves acclaimed Agathemer's cooking; for, if their rations were still scanty by order of the watchful manager, at least their food was edible. Far from being ultimately killed, like our predecessors, and continually threatened and reviled, we were blessed by our fellow-slaves. We slept better, in spite of the vermin, on our grass-stuffed mattresses, under our foul quilts, we shivered less in our thicker tunics. We were not too tired to discuss, at times, the oddities of our vicissitudes, to congratulate each other on being, at least, alive, on my not being suspected of being what I actually was, and, above all, on the safety of our old, blackened, greasy, worthless-looking, amulet-bags, with their precious contents. To be reduced to carrying food to three hundred of the vilest rascals alive was a horrible fate for a man who had, two years before, been a wealthy nobleman, but it was far better than death as a suspected conspirator. And Agathemer was hopeful of our future, of survival, of escape, of comfort somewhere after he had sold another emerald, ruby, or opal. Nothing could, for any length of time, dim or cloud the light of Agathemer's buoyancy of disposition.

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