

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO
VOL.III
BY
EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

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CHAPTER XXII THE MUTINEERS

Our promotion from the mills to the kitchen took place early in March of the year when Manius Acilius Glabrio, after an interval of thirty-four years since his first consulship, was consul for the second time and had as nominal associate Commodus, preening himself, for the fifth time, on the highest office in the Republic, which he had done little to deserve, and while he held it, did less to justify himself in possessing, since he left most of the duties of the consulship to Glabrio, as he left most of the Principate to Perennis, his Prefect of the Praetorium. All of this, of course, we learnt later in the year; for, inside our prison, we knew nothing of what went on in Placentia, let alone of what went on in Italy and in Rome itself.

We had been cooking for more than three months, when, about the middle of June, our attention in the cellars was distracted from doling out food, as that of the wretches we served was distracted from eating their scanty rations, by an unusual uproar in the street outside of our windows. We could descry, in the morning sunlight, military trappings, tattered cloaks, ragged tunics, dingy kilt-straps, sheenless helmets, unkempt beards, and brawny arms in the crowds which packed the narrow streets. The mob seemed made up of rough frontier soldiery, and we marvelled at the presence of such men in Italy.

The uproar increased and we heard it not only from the streets but from the courtyards; we could not make out any words, but the tone of the tumultuous growls was menacing and imperative. After no long interval the doors at the foot of the one stair burst open and there entered to us three centurions, indubitably from distant frontier garrisons, accompanied by six or seven optiones [Footnote: See Note F.] and a dozen or more legionaries. The privates and corporals stood silent while one of the three sergeants addressed us:

"No one shall be compelled to join us. Every man of you shall have his unforced choice. All who join us shall be free. Such as prefer to remain where they are sit down! All who select to join us stand up!"

If any man sat down I did not see him. Through the door we flowed without jostling or crowding, for at the first appearance of a tendency to push forward the sergeant's big voice bellowed a warning and order reigned. Up the stair we poured, passing on the landing the mute, motionless porter-accountant and his Scythian guard, cowed immobile between two burly frontier centurions; out into the courtyard we streamed,

more and more following till the courtyard was packed. The whole movement was made in silence, without a cheer or yell, for, like the porter and the Scythians, the most unconscionable villains in our ergastulum quailed before the truculence of the frontier sergeants.

In the outer court, at the suggestion of one of those same centurions, every man of us drank his fill at the well-curb, pairs of the legionaries taking turns at hauling up the buckets and watering us, much as if we had been thirsty workhorses. After they had made sure that none had missed a chance to quench his thirst, they roughly marshalled us into some semblance of order and out into the street we trooped, where we found ourselves between two detachments of frontier soldiers, one filling the street ahead of us from house-wall to house-wall, the other similarly blocking the street behind us. Between them we were marched to the market-square, where we had plenty of room, for we had it all to ourselves, the soldiery having cleared it and a squad of them blocking the entrance of each street leading into it, so that the townsfolk were kept out and we herded among the frontier soldiery.

Their centurions, to the number of eighteen, stood together on the stone platform from which orators were accustomed to address or harangue such crowds as might assemble in the market-square. Before it we packed ourselves as closely as we could, eager to hear. About us idled the soldiery not occupied in guarding the approach to the square.

One of the sergeants made a speech to us, explaining our liberation and their presence in Placentia. He called us "comrades" and began his harangue with a long and virulent denunciation of Perennis, the Prefect of the Palace. Perennis, he declared, had been a slave of the vilest origin and had won his freedom and the favor of the Palace authorities and of the Emperor not by merit but by rank favoritism. He maintained that Perennis, as Prefect of the Palace, had gained such an ascendancy over Commodus that besides his proper duties as guardian of the Emperor's personal safety, surely a charge sufficiently heavy to burden any one man and sufficiently honorable to satisfy any reasonable man, his master had been enticed into entrusting to Perennis the management of the entire Empire, so that he alone controlled promotions in and appointments to the navy, army and treasury services. In this capacity, as sole minister and representative of the sovereign, Perennis had enriched himself by taking bribes from all from whom he could extort bribes. By his venality he had gone far towards ruining the navy and army, which were by now more than half officered by hopeless incompetents who had bought their appointments. As a result the legionaries garrisoning the lines along the Euphrates, the Carpathians, the Danube, the Rhine and the Wall, since they were badly led, had suffered undeserved mishandling from the barbarians attacking them; and even the garrisons of mountain districts like Armenia, Pisidia, and Lusitania had been mauled by

the bands of outlaws. He instanced the rebellion of Maternus as a result of the incompetence and venality of Perennis.

Worse than this, he said, Perennis was plotting the Emperor's assassination and the elevation to the Principate of one of his two sons. This project of his, which he was furthering by astute secret machinations, had come to the knowledge of a loyal member of the Emperor's retinue. He had written of it to a brother of his, Centurion [Footnote: See Note D.] of the Thirteenth Legion, entitled "Victorious" and quartered on the Wall, along the northern frontier of Britain, towards the Caledonian Highlands. This letter had reached the quarters of the Thirteenth Legion late in September. Its recipient had at once communicated to his fellow-sergeants the horrible intimation which it contained. They had resolved to do all in their power to save their Prince by forestalling and foiling the treacherous Perennis. They had called a meeting of their garrison and disclosed their information to their men. The legionaries acclaimed their decision. Deputations set out east and west along the Wall and roused the other cohorts of the Thirteenth Legion and those of the Twenty-Seventh. From the Wall messengers galloped south to the garrisons throughout Britain. In an incredibly short time, despite the approach and onset of winter, they apprised every garrison in the island. Messengers from every garrison reached every garrison. So rapidly was mutual comprehension and unanimity established, so secretly did they operate, that on the Nones of January all the garrisons in Britain simultaneously mutinied, overpowered their unsuspecting officers, disclosed to them the reasons for their sedition, and invited them to join them. Of all the officers on the island only two hesitated to agree with their men. These, after some expostulation, were killed. The rest resumed their duties, if competent, or were relegated to civilian life, if adjudged incompetent.

The three most prominent legions in Britain, the Sixth, Thirteenth and Twentieth, each entitled, because of prowess displayed in past campaigns, to the appellation of "Victorious," selected the equivalent of a cohort apiece to unite into a deputation representing the soldiery of Britain collectively, to proceed to Rome, reveal to the Emperor his danger, save him, foil Perennis, and see to it that he was put to death. In pursuance of this plan the six centuries chosen by the Thirteenth Legion, about five hundred men, had set out southward from the Wall on the day before the Ides of January. Accomplishing the march of a hundred and thirty-five miles to Eburacum, in spite of deep snow and heavy snow-storms, in fourteen days, there they foregathered with the main body of the Sixth Legion and were joined by their six selected centuries. The twelve, some thousand picked men, accomplished the march of eighty-five miles to Deva in nine days, though hampered by terrible weather. There they were joined by the delegates of the Twentieth Legion. Together the fifteen hundred deputies made the march of two hundred and eighty miles to Ritupis by way of Londinium, in twenty-eight days. At Ritupis they took part in the festival of Isis, by which navigation was declared

open for the year and navigation blessed. Next day, on the day before the Nones of March, they had sailed for Gaul and made the crossing in ten hours, without any hindrance from headwinds or bad weather.

From Gessoriacum they had tramped across Gaul, inducing to join them such kindred spirits as they encountered among the squads of recent levies being drilled at each large town preparatory to being forwarded to reinforce the frontier garrisons. These inexperienced recruits they had organized into centuries under sergeants elected by the recruits themselves from among themselves, which elective centurions had handily learnt their novel duties from instructions given by one or two veterans detailed to aid in drilling each new century. Before they reached Vapincum they had associated with them fresh comrades equalling themselves in number, equipped from town arsenals. With these they had crossed into Italy through the Cottian Alps.

At Segusio they had been told that, under the misrule of Perennis, the ergastula of Italy were filled, not half with runaway slaves, petty thieves, rascals, ruffians and outlaws, but mainly with honest fellows who had committed no crime, but had been secretly arrested and consigned to their prisons merely because they had incurred the displeasure of Perennis or of one of his henchmen, or had been suspected, however vaguely, of actions, words or even of unspoken opinions distasteful to him or to anyone powerful through him. Acting on that information they had been setting free the inmates of ergastula in cities through which they had passed, such as Turin and Milan, and had formed from these victims two fresh centuries. They proposed that we join them and march with them to Rome to inform and rescue our Emperor and foil and kill Perennis.

Of course the liberated riffraff accepted this suggestion with enthusiasm and without a dissenting voice. We were divided into squads of convenient size and marched off to the near-by bathing establishments. In that to which Agathemer and I were led, we, with the rest of our squad, were told by the sergeant superintending us to strip. Our worn, tattered and lousy garments were turned over to the bath-attendants to be steamed and then disposed of as they might. We were thoroughly steamed and scrubbed, so that every man of us was freed from every sort of vermin. During our bath the centurion, in charge of us unobtrusively inspected us individually and collectively. In the dressing-room of the bathing establishments, after we had been steamed, scrubbed, baked, and dried, we were clad in military tunics fetched from the town arsenal or its store-houses. Also we were provided with military boots of the coarsest and cheapest materials, made after the pattern usual for frontier regiments.

Outside the bath the watchful sergeant divided us into two squads, a larger and a smaller, the smaller made up of those who, like Agathemer and me, bore brands, and scourge-marks. In the market-square we were again herded together, surrounded by the

British legionaries and now ourselves divided into those like me and Agathemer, who were marked as runaway slaves and the larger number who showed no marks of scourge or brand. From among the unmarked the frontier centurions picked out thirty whom they judged likely material for sergeants like themselves. These thirty they bade select from among themselves three. Then they set the three, an Umbrian and a Ligurian outlaw, and a Dalmatian pirate, along the front of the stone platform and asked us whether we would accept those three as our centurions. Two speakers, one a Venetian and the other an Insubrian Gaul, objected to the pirate. In his place we were bidden to choose some other from the twenty-seven already selected by the sergeants. A second Umbrian outlaw was selected.

Then the centurions bade the newly-elected three to choose each one man in rotation, until they had made up for each the nucleus of a century from the unmarked men.

After the three new centuries were thus constituted, they asked them to decide whether they would accept as comrades and associates the residue of the inmates of our ergastulum who were marked plainly as runaway slaves. They voted overwhelmingly to accept us. Then the three new sergeants proceeded to choose us also into their centuries. The choosing was interrupted by a Ravenna Gaul, who called the attention of the assembly to the fact that Agathemer had been cook to the ergastulum and I his helper; similarly to the baker and his assistant. After some discussion it was unanimously voted that the baker and his helper be treated as any others of the liberated rascals, that the three new centurions draw lots which should have Agathemer for cook to his century and me for his helper, and that the other two centuries appoint cooks by lot unless cooks and helpers volunteered. Four of the brand-marked rabble at once volunteered.

After the last man had been selected and the British centurions had marshalled, inspected and approved the three new centuries thus constituted, we were marched off to the town arsenal and there equipped with corselets, strap-kilts, greaves; cloaks, helmets, shields, swords and spears; only Agathemer, I, and the four other cooks and helpers, were given no spears, shields, helmets or body-armour, only swords, jackets and caps.

Then, full-fledged tumultuary legionaries, we were marshalled as well as greenhorns could be ranked and we marched from the market-place the length of the street leading to the Fidentia Gate. Outside it we found the semblance of a camping-ground and tents ready for us to set up. Up we set them, we new recruits, clumsily, under the jeers of the old-timers, to the tune of taunts and curses from the disgusted veteran centurions.

When the camp was set up a fire was made for each century and we cooks and helpers fell to our duties, with a squad of privates to cut wood, feed the fires, fetch water and do

any other rough preparatory work, such as butchering a sheep or a goat, killing, picking and cleaning fowls, and what not. For this welcome, if clumsy, assistance we had to thank one of the British centurions, who admonished our newly-elected Umbrian sergeant that camp-cookery called for any needed number of assistant helpers to the chief cook if the men were to be fed properly and promptly.

The town officials had sent out to the camp a generous provision of wheat, barley, lentils, pulse, sheep, goats, fowls, cheese, oil, salt and wine. I did not learn how the volunteer cooks fared, but the barley-stew, seasoned with minced fowls, which Agathemer concocted, was acclaimed by our century.

That night, in our tent, Agathemer and I, talking Greek and whispering, discussed our situation. After two fulfillments, the prophesy of the Aemilian Sibyl seemed in a fair way to be fulfilled a third time; we were headed for Rome.

To Rome we went. We had, in that first consultation, in many similar consultations later, planned to escape and hoped to escape. But we were too carefully watched. Whether we were suspected because of our scourge- marks and brand-marks, or were prized as cooks, or whether there was some other reason, we could not conjecture. Certainly we were sedulously guarded on all marches, and kept strictly within, each camp, though we were free to wander about each camp as we pleased.

We had planned to escape in or near Parma, Mutina, Bononia, or Faventia, any of which towns Agathemer judged a favorable locality for marketing a gem from our amulet-bags. But in these, as everywhere else, our guards gave us no chance of escape.

When not busy cooking I found myself greatly interested in the amazing company among which I was cast. In my rambles about our camp, when all were full-fed and groups sat or lay chatting about the slackening camp- fires, I became acquainted with most of the eighteen centurions from the legions quartered in Britain, and had talks, sometimes even long talks, with more than half of them. These bluff, burly frontier sergeants, like their corporals and men, treated all their volunteer associates as welcome comrades, even weltd and branded runaway slaves acting as cooks. From them I heard again and again the story of discontent, conspiracy, mutiny, insurrection and attempt at protest about rectification of the evils they believed to exist, which tale we had all heard outlined by the sergeant-orator in the Forum of Placentia.

Among the eighteen centurions there was no sergeant-major nor any centurion of the upper rank. The highest in army rank was Sextius Baculus of Isca, a native of Britain and lineally descended, through an original colonist of Isca, from the celebrated sergeant-major of the Divine Julius. He had been twelfth in rank in the Sixth Legion,

being second centurion of its second cohort. Not one of his seventeen associates had ranked so high: the next highest being Publius Cordatus, of Lindum, who had been second sergeant of the fourth cohort in the Twentieth Legion.

The totality of my mental impressions of what I heard from these two and other members of this incredible deputation of insurgent mutineers and of what I saw of the doings of the whole deputation, was vague and confused. From the confusion emerged a predominating sense of their many inconsistencies and of the haphazard irresponsibility and inconsequence of their states of mind and actions. They were, indeed, entirely consistent in one respect. Unlike Maternus and his men, not one of them blamed Commodus for anything, not even for having appointed Perennis to his high office and then having permitted him to arrogate to himself all the functions of the government of the Republic and Empire. One and all they excused the Emperor and expressed for him enthusiastic loyalty: one and all they blamed not only the Prefect's mismanagement but also his own appointment on Perennis. Consistent as they were in holding these opinions or in having such feelings, the notions were inconsistent in themselves.

So likewise was their often expressed and manifestly sincere intention to forestall the consummation of the alleged conspiracy and save the Emperor inconsistent with their slow progress from Britain towards Rome. Never having been in Britain and knowing little of it from such reports as I had heard, I could not controvert their assertion that the state of the roads and weather there had made impossible greater speed than they had achieved from their quarters to their port, yet I suspected that men really systematically in earnest might have accomplished in twenty days marches which had occupied them for fifty-one days. I was certain that it was nothing short of ridiculous for legionaries in hard fighting condition and well fed to consume one hundred and one days in marching from their landing-port on the coast of Gaul to Placentia: ten miles a day was despicable marching even for lazy and soft-muscled recruits; any legionaries should make fifteen, miles at day under any conditions, earnest men keyed up to hurry should have made twenty and might often march twenty-five miles between camps. These blatherskites were on fire with high resolve, by their talk, yet had loafed along for a thousand miles, camping early, sleeping long after sunrise, resting at midday and gorging themselves at leisurely meals. All this was amazing.

Equally astonishing was the condition of supineness, of all governmental officials in Gaul, local and Imperial, as their tale revealed it. Neither the Prefect of the Rhine, nor any one of the Procurators of Gaul, had, as far as their story indicated, made any effort to arrest them, turn them back, stop them, check them, hinder them or even have them expostulated with. As far as I could infer from all I heard neither had the governing body of any city or town. For all they were interfered with by any official they might have been full-time veterans, honorably discharged, marching homeward under accredited officers

provided with diplomas properly made out, signed, sealed and stamped. Everywhere they had been fed at public expense, lodged free or provided with camping-grounds and tents; their pack-animals had been replaced if worn out, and everything they needed had been provided on their asking for it or even before they made any request. I could only infer that they had inspired fear by their numbers and truculence and that each town or district had striven to keep them in a good humor and to get rid of them as soon as possible by entertaining them lavishly and speeding them along their chosen way.

As they told of their own behavior there had been no consistency or system or method in their additions to their company. By their own account they had enticed men to join them or had ignored likely recruits in the most haphazard fashion, purely as the humor struck them. The like was true of their emptyings of ergastula in Italy. At Turin, as well as I could gather from my chats with this or that centurion or soldier or liberated slave, they had set free the inmates of the ergastulum by the Segusio Gate and had then turned aside to that by the Vercellae Gate, but had ignored the larger ergastulum by the Milan Gate; though they had marched out of Turin, necessarily, by that gate. Similarly at Milan, they had emptied two ergastula and ignored the rest; as at Placentia, where they had expended all their time and energy on the first ergastulum they happened on inside the Milan Gate and on ours, and then had ignored or forgotten the four or five others, equally large and equally well filled.

On our progress to Rome I saw similar inconsistencies in their behavior. They never so much as entered Fidentia, but marched round it, acquiescent to the gentle suggestion of a trembling and incoherent alderman, quaking with fear and barely able to enunciate some disjointed sentences. At Parma they emptied two ergastula and never so much as approached the others, repeating this inconsistency at Mutina and Bononia. Outside of Faventia something, I never learned what, enraged a knot of the veterans, so that their fury communicated itself to all the soldiery from Britain and inflamed their associates, Gallic and Italian. Whereupon we burst the Bononia Gate of Faventia, flocked into the town, sacked some of the shops, left a score of corpses in the market-place and some in the streets near it, set fire to a block of buildings, and burst out of the Ariminum Gate, tumultuous and excited, but without so much as trying the outer doors of any ergastulum.

Yet, after this riotous performance, we did no damage at Ariminum, not even entering the town, not even enquiring if it had an ergastulum, as it must have had.

Similarly at Pisaurum, at Fanum Fortunae, at Forum Sempronii, though these were small towns and could not have resisted us, we camped outside, accepted gracefully the tents and food provided for us and made no move to maltreat anyone or do any looting. But at Nuceria, at Spolium and at Narnia we entered the towns and liberated the

inmates of two of the ergastula, in each, though we never so much as threatened Interamnia.

Looking back over these proceedings I explain them to myself approximately as follows: the eighteen centurions from Britain treated each other as if they all felt on terms of complete mutual equality, none ever assumed any rights of superiority, seniority, precedence, or authority, none was ever invested with any right of permanent or temporary leadership. If some whim prompted any one of the eighteen to take the lead in emptying an ergastulum or breaking in a town gate, or sacking a shop, not one of his fellow-sergeants demurred or expostulated or opposed him; they all concurred in any suggestion of any one of them. And the soldiers followed their centurions with, apparently, implicit confidence in them, or a blind instinct of deference. So of submission to the request of any town decurion, that they stay outside: mostly, they were acquiescent. But if something irritated a sergeant, or even a soldier, the entire deputation flamed into fury and burst gates, sacked shops and even fired buildings until their rage spent itself, after which they were civil and kindly to all townsmen, whether officials, citizens, slaves or women and children. I never could detect any reason for any action or inaction of theirs.

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CHAPTER XXIII THE EMPEROR

The liberations of public slaves from ergastula in Turin, Milan, Placentia, Parma, Mutina, Bononia, Nuceria, Spolitum and Narnia resulted in the formation of eighteen tumultuary centuries, which, between Narnia and Ocriculum, during a long noon-halt, were formed into the semblance of three cohorts, thus we approached Rome as nine cohorts: three of the deputies from Britain; three more of the recruits from Gaul, presumably like the British legionaries, loyal patriots, bent on foiling Perennis, and saving their beloved Emperor; and three more composed of the contents of a dozen or more ergastula, opened as the whim took the veteran sergeants, and assumed to contain not pilferers, runaways or evil-doers, but innocent victims of the malignity of the understrappers of that unspeakable Perennis.

As we drew near Rome Agathemer and I discussed our situation and prospects with increasing alarm. After we left Narnia the watch on us was not so close and we might have escaped. But we had seen a score of attempts at escape, by various rascals, foiled and ending in the butchery of the would-be fugitives. While escape was possible the risk was very great. Also, Agathemer argued, we were too near to Rome to be safe if we got clear away. Between dread of death if caught and fear of we knew not what if we escaped, we stuck to our cookery. Mixed with our projects for bettering our prospects we talked much of our amazement at the treatment which the deputation and its associates had met in Italy. Manifestly the townsfolk and their officials were not only overawed, but helpless. If there had been no Rome, no Republic, no Praetorians, no Prefect of the Palace, no central authority whatever we could not have been more completely free from hindrance, coercion or question, Yet Agathemer and I could not but conjecture that the Senate, Perennis and Commodus had been promptly and minutely informed of all our doings, of our progress, of our approach; and had taken measures to deal with us and our instigators. We felt panicky.

Spouting long tirades about their loyalty to the Emperor, their hatred of Perennis and their eagerness to foil one and save the other, our irresponsible frontier centurions let their men and us loiter southward through Cisalpine Gaul and Umbria as they had loitered on the other side of the Alps, seldom marching more than ten miles a day. So that we left Ocriculum on the tenth day before the Kalends of August and stopped overnight at each change-station.

We had had fair weather all the way from Placentia, except a heavy rain at Ariminum and showers in the mountains between Forum Sempronii and Nuceria. When day dawned on us at Rostrata Villa, on the eighth day before the Kalends of August, it dawned cloudy, but not threatening. After the usual camp breakfast of porridge and wine, we fell in, by now fairly decent marchers, and set off for Rubrae. But before we had marched a mile, the low clouds soaked us with such a downpour as I had seldom seen of a July morning near Rome. So heavy and so unrelenting was the rain that we were glad to halt at the change-house at the twentieth mile-stone, where the road from Capena to Veii crosses the Flaminian Highway and where there is a prosperous village as large as many a small town. There we found quarters and food ready for us and were well entertained. Ad Vicesimum, as the place is called, is only four miles nearer Rome than Villa Rostrata.

It was about midway of that four-mile march in the pouring rain that I saw by the roadside three immobile horsemen, their forms swathed in horsemen's rain-cloaks, their faces hidden under broad-brimmed rain-hats, lined up with their horses' noses barely a horse-length from the roadway, watching from a little knoll our column as it passed. The middle horseman of the three looked familiar. I glanced back at him and met his eyes, intensely watching me from under his dripping hat brim, as I trudged on the edge of the trudging rabble. A hot qualm surged through me. It was, it certainly was, the very same man I had seen in the very same guise on the road below Villa Andivia as Tanno and I passed by on our way to our fatal brawl at Vediumnum; the very man who had peered in at me and Capito during his fatal conference with me in Nemestronia's water-garden, the man whom Tanno had asserted that he knew for an Imperial spy. I felt recognition in his gaze; felt that he knew me for my very self. And his nose was hooked.

At our halting place, when Agathemer and I were alone, I asked him in Greek if he had noticed the three stationary horsemen. He at once, without my mentioning my suspicions, declared that he also had recognized the middle horseman precisely as I had. What his presence there might forbode, what his apparent recognition of me might portend, we could not conjecture. We agreed that, although both of us had been on the lookout for Imperial emissaries all the way from Placentia, and alertly watching from Ariminum southwards, this was the first time we had set eyes on any man whom we could take for a secret-service man. That so much time had elapsed since the authorities must have been warned of our approach, that we should have advanced so near Rome and yet that this should be the first visible indication of espionage upon us, amazed both me and Agathemer.

Next day, a cloudy but rainless day, we marched only to Rubrae, the change-station nearest Rome. There, as at every previous halt, we found the authorities apprised of our

approach and prepared to lodge and feed us. And, as always since we left Nuceria, we were comfortably sheltered in a camp all ready for our occupancy and lavishly provided with varied food and passable wine.

Next day, the sixth day before the Kalends of August, dawned exquisitely fair and bright, with a soft steady breeze; a perfect July day, mild but not too warm. Our elected sergeants, now quite habituated to their duties and authority as centurions, routed us up early and, after a leisurely camp-breakfast, we fell in and set off on the last stage of this amazing unopposed march of fifteen hundred insurgent mutineers for nineteen hundred miles, in making which they had so loitered that they had consumed on the road more than half a year and along which they had added to their company casual associates twice as numerous as themselves. We left Rubrae an excited horde, for the veterans were keyed up to a tense pitch of expectancy by their anticipation of they knew not what culmination to their insane adventure and their accidental recruits were aquiver with uneasiness and apprehension.

The Mulvian Bridge over the Tiber is not more than four miles from Rubrae along the winding Flaminian Highway and we were crossing it before the third hour of the day was past. Marching with the first of the three centuries formed at Placentia I had about five-sixths of our column ahead of me. So I did not see, did not even glimpse, did not, from far towards the rear, so much as guess what was happening. I knew only that, as I was more than half way across the Mulvian Bridge, a wave of cheers started far forward in our column and ran back to my century and all the way to the rearmost men. What had occurred we did not know, but we broke ranks and flowed out of the road to left and right, as did the men ahead of us, becoming almost a mob, despite the remonstrances and orders of our disgusted sergeants. They restrained us to some extent, but we were kept back more by the fact that the foremost men blocked the highway, the men who had been marching next them blocked the fields to right and left of the highway and the rest of us were checked behind them, like water above a dam.

As we stood there, packed together, with hardly a semblance of ranks kept anywhere, craning to see over the heads of the men in front of us and to try to see past and between the many big and tall tombs and mausoleums which flanked the road on either side, a period of tense silence or blurred murmurings was ended by a second great surge of cheers from front to rear. We all cheered till we were hoarse. Again we peered and listened and questioned each other, again came a roar of cheering like a sea billow. Again and again alternated the half silence and the uproar. Before we learned what was happening or had happened word came from mouth to mouth that we were going on. The press in front of us gradually melted away, we were able to sidle into the roadway, reform ranks and tramp on Romewards.

After a very brief march we turned aside to our right into a meadow on the west of the road and its flanking rows of tombs, between the Highway and the Tiber, about half way from Mulvian Bridge to the Flaminian Gate of Rome; that is, about half a mile from each. There we found a meticulously laid-out and perfectly appointed camp, precisely suited to the forty-five hundred of us and our requisitioned mules, wagons and what not. It contained some four hundred and fifty tents, set on clipped grass along rolled and gravelled streets as straight as bricklayers' guide-boards; all about a paved square of ample size, on the rear of which was set up a gorgeous commander's tent of the whitest canvas, striped with red almost as deep, rich and glowing as the Imperial crimson, and manifestly meant to imitate it as closely as such a dyestuff could. On either side of this Praetorium were a dozen tents, smaller indeed than the Praetorium, but much larger than tents set up for us, presumably for the commanders' aides. In front of the Praetorium, between it and the square, was a wide, broad and high platform of new brickwork, paved on top, railed with solid, low, carved railings set in short carved oak posts. The corner posts, and two others dividing the front and back of the platform equally, were tall and supported an awning of striped canvas like that of the commander's tent.

Goggling with curiosity we, as we deployed to our quarters, stared hard at the magnificent tent and sumptuous platform with its gorgeous awning. Once at our quarters, I and Agathemer, of course, must cook and serve food to our century. Only after all were fed did we, in common with all the middle and rear of our road-column, learn what had occurred.

While we ate, our sergeants, while they also ate somehow, held a centurions' council, at which those of the fifty-four who had not been far enough forward on the Highway to see and hear were informed, by those who had, of what had happened. When our sergeant returned from this council he told us, in a jumbled and mumbled attempt at an address.

From what he told me and from what I heard later I gather that, as the column debouched from the bridge, its head was met and checked by a body of mounted Praetorian Guards. Their tribune, in the name of the Emperor, ordered the column to halt and bade its centurions deploy their men right and left and mass them in a largish space free of big tombs. As they deployed the Praetorians also deployed to left and right of the Highway and the foremost mutineers descried on the roadway the splendid horses and gorgeous trappings of the Emperor's personal staff, among whom, from the statues, busts and painted panel-portraits of him which they had seen daily in their own quarters and countless times on their road to Rome, the more alert of them recognized their liege.

Then rose that unexpected wave of cheering which had first apprized us in the rear that something unusual was toward. Commodus, as I heard from Publius Cordatus himself, after our nap and before the Emperor's return, was mounted on a tall sorrel such as his father had always preferred on his frontier campaigns. Also he was garbed not only as his father had habitually been when on frontier expeditions, but seemingly, in one of his old outfits. For not only Cordatus, but a dozen more, declared that his helmet, corselet and the plates of his kilt-straps, were of ungilded, unchased, plain steel, not even bright with polishing, but tarnished, all but rusty, with exposure to rain, mist and sun; his plume and cloak rain-faded and sun-faded till their crimson showed almost brown; his scabbard plain, dingy leather; his saddle of similar cheap, durable leather, his saddle-cloth of a crimson faded as brown as his cloak and plume. This was precisely the Spartan simplicity which Aurelius, as more than half a Stoic, had always affected, partly from an innate tendency towards self-restraint and modesty, partly that his example might, at first, offset the sumptuousness of Verus and, after his death, might inculcate, by example, economy in his lavish and self-indulgent retinue.

Whatever the motive, by this semi-histrionic effort at self-effacement the Emperor made himself tenfold conspicuous among his staff-officers, whose plumes, cloaks, kilts, and saddle-cloths blazed with crimson, green and gold, blue and silver and even crimson and gold.

Commodus, in any gear, was not only a tall, well-knit, impressive figure of a man, but, in his most negligent moods, he had something about him dominating, masterful, princely and Imperial. The sight of him cowed all who could then see him. Steadily he eyed them as they finished their tumultuary deployment and pressed forward to see and hear. When they were packed as closely as possible till no more could get within earshot he spoke:

"Fellow soldiers, what does this mean?"

All were too awed at the sight of their venerated Caesar for any man to speak up at once and the Emperor repeated:

"Fellow-soldiers, what does this mean? Tell me, I am your fellow-soldier."

Then Sextius Baculus himself replied, choking and hesitating, quailing before his lord:

"We are your loyal soldiers from Britain; a deputation come afoot and afloat almost two thousand miles to warn you of what no man in Rome, for fear of you more than of your treacherous Prefect, dares to warn you. Perennis is no fit guardian of your safety; in fact he is of all men most unfit. For more than two years now he has been laying his plans to

have you assassinated, and to make Emperor in your place his eldest son, the darling of the Illyrian legionaries. We have come to save you, foil him and see him and his dead."

"Fellow-soldiers," the Emperor spoke at once, loudly and clearly, "I acclaim your purpose and welcome your good intentions. But I mean to prove to you that I am in fact as well as in title Tribune and Prince of the Republic, Emperor of its armies, Augustus and Caesar. Your solicitude I applaud, but I feel better able to take care of myself than can any other man save myself. I fear no man and appoint no man I distrust. I distrust few men after appointment. You lodge a grave charge against a man I have trusted, appointed and then trusted. I condemn few men unheard. As your Imperator I command you to camp where my legates indicate, to eat a hearty noon meal, to sleep, or at least rest in your tents, two full hours. About the tenth hour of the day I shall return, my trusty guards about me and Perennis himself in my retinue. From the platform of your camp, as a chief commander should, I will harangue you, and from that platform, after he has heard from me your accusation, my Prefect of the Praetorium shall make to you his defense. After he has spoken you shall hear me deliver just and impartial judgment, a judgment no man of you can but accept as fair and righteous.

"And now farewell, until the tenth hour."

At which word he had reined up, wheeled and spurred his mettlesome mount and thereupon vanished with his staff in a cloud of dust, at full gallop.

According to the Emperor's behest we rested in our tents after the centurions had each harangued his men. But if any slept, it was a marvel. All were too excited to sleep and every tent, as far as I could learn, talked without cessation. By the tenth hour, when the sun was visibly declining and the warmth of the midday abating, we were all assembled in the camp-square, the men helmeted and with their swords at their sides, but without shields or spears.

It was perfectly in keeping with the inconsistency of the mutineers that the crowd of men in the camp-square, instead of being marshalled by centuries under their sergeants, was allowed to assemble mob-fashion as each man came and pushed. Thus Agathemer and I, who should have been preparing to cook our company's evening meal, were not only in the throng, but well forward among the men and, in fact, pressed legs and chests against the legs and backs of two veterans not far from the rearmost centurions of the gathering of sergeants, not sixty feet from the platform, and nearly opposite its middle, though a little to the left. Few veteran privates heard and saw better than we.

When the Imperial cortege arrived and the platform began to fill, we two, like the men around us and like, I feel sure, the entire gathering, were amazed to see among the men

four women, and Agathemer and I were doubly amazed to recognize one as Marcia. Agathemer, who knew the former slaves and present freedwomen of the Palace far better than I, whispered that the others were the sister and wife of Perennis and the wife of Cleander, like him a former slave and pampered freedman, and for long his rival.

The platform, of course, was lined and partly filled with aides, lictors, equerries, pages, and other Imperial satellites before the Emperor rode up, dismounted and appeared among his retinue. He strode springily to the front and seated himself on the crimson cushion of the ivory curule seat which a lictor placed for him. Marcia, to my tenfold amazement, then seated herself on a not dissimilar maple folding-seat, spread for her by a page. She was placed at the very front of the platform, next him on his right. Next her was Cleander's wife, also, to my still greater amazement, similarly seated, as were the two almost as ornately clad ladies with Perennis, who sat on his left, he standing to the left of the Emperor, who was set only a short yard in advance of the row of officials and intimates who lined the front of the platform.

Until all who had a right to places on the platform had mounted it and each had stationed himself in his proper position, the Emperor sat quietly regarding the mob of men facing him, eyeing us keenly and steadily. An equerry leaned over and whispered to him and he stood up. I could feel the men thrill, even more positively than they had thrilled when he appeared from among his retinue. I conjectured, instantly, that he had felt, if not an actual dread of the mutineers, at least a doubt as to his ability to quell them and a need for all possible adventitious aids. Thus I explained to myself his having donned, that morning, trappings such as his father had worn on frontier campaigns, apparently with the purpose of eliciting the sympathies of the men.

He now wore a gilded helmet, elaborately chased, and its crest a carved Chimaera spouting golden flames, which golden spout of flames, with the Chimaera's wings, formed the support from which waved his crimson plume, all of brilliantly dyed ostrich feathers. His corselet was similarly gilded or, perhaps, like the helmet, even of pure gold hammered and chased, adorned with depictions of the battles of the gods and giants above, and below with Trajan's victories over the Parthians. His kilt- straps were of crimson leather, plated with gilt or gold overlapping scales. His cloak was of the newest and most brilliant Imperial crimson. The platform was so high that I could clearly see his shapely calves and the gold eagles embroidered on the sky-blue soft leather of his half- boots. In his hand, he held a short baton or truncheon, such as all field-commanders carry as an emblem of independent command, such as I had seen at Tegulata in the hand of Pescennius Niger. It was gilded or gold-plated and its ends were chased pine-cones. Manifestly every detail of his habiting had been meticulously considered and the total effect carefully calculated. Certainly he was not only handsome and winsome, but dignified and imposing, truly a princely and Imperial figure.

Evidently he had calculatingly arrayed himself so as to appear at one and the same time as Emperor and as a field-commander. The effect on the men, if I could judge, was all he had wished, all he could have hoped for. He dominated the mob of men as he dominated the platform.

There was no need of his wave of the arm enjoining silence. The silence, from his first movement as he rose, was as complete as possible.

"Fellow-soldiers," he said, and he spoke as well as the most practiced orator, audibly to all, smoothly and charmingly, "you have come from Britain across the sea, across Gaul, across the Alps, and half the length of Italy, with the best intentions, with the sincerest hearts, to apprise me of danger to me in my own Palace, danger unsuspected by me, as you believe. Your loyalty, your good intentions, your sincerity I realize and rejoice over. But I find it hard to believe that any soldiers in distant frontier garrisons can be better informed than the Prince himself of what goes on in Italy, in Rome, in the very Palace. You have lodged the gravest accusations against one of my most important and most trusted officials. I shall now state your charges, that the accused man may hear them now for the first time from my own lips and may here and now make his defence to you and to me."

He paused. My eyes had been on Commodus and now shifted to Perennis. Perennis was a handsome man, but in spite of, rather than because of, his build and features. Even through the splendid trappings of Prefect of the Praetorium he appeared too tall and too thin, his neck was too long, his face too long, his ears too big, his long nose overhung his upper lip. He was impressive and capable looking but appeared too crafty, too foxy. I felt sure that he had not the least suspicion of what was coming. He looked all vanity, self-satisfaction and vainglorious self-sufficiency.

"Fellow-soldiers," the Emperor went on, "you charge that my Prefect of the Praetorium is not loyal, but is most treacherous; that he has been, for more than two years, plotting my death and the elevation to the Principiate of his eldest son, now Procurator of Illyricum. As he has now heard the charge, so you shall now hear the defense of my Prefect of the Praetorium."

I must say that Perennis, though manifestly thunderstruck, kept his senses, kept his self-command and, after a brief instant in which he paled, swayed and seemed utterly dazed, rose to the occasion. For that brief instant he appeared as overcome as his horrified wife and sister, who all but fainted on their seats; as his horrified sons, who stood, agape, dead-pale, one by his white-faced mother, and the other by his incredulous aunt.

Perennis, certainly, gathered himself together promptly, got himself under full control, had all his wits about him and made a perfectly conceived, finely delivered, coherent, logical, telling speech in his own defence. It was long, but nowhere diffuse, and it held the attention manifestly, not only of the mutineers, but of the Emperor himself, and of all his retinue, even the most vacuous of the mere courtiers. As he ended it, it was plain that Perennis believed he had cleared himself completely and had not only vindicated himself before his master, but had convinced the mutineers of his guiltlessness and loyalty. His expression of face, as he wound up his eloquent peroration, was that of a man who, unexpectedly to himself, transmounts insuperable difficulties and triumphs.

Confidently he turned to Commodus; smiling and at ease, he awaited his decision. The Emperor stood up, more dominating, if possible, than before.

"Fellow-soldiers," he said, "watch me closely and listen carefully. What I do shall be as significant as what I say. I have pondered your charges since you made them this morning. In my mind I have run over all that I knew of this man's doings and sayings since I made him the guardian of my personal safety. I have let him hear your charges from my own lips and, like you, I have listened patiently to his brilliant and able speech in his own defence. I am Prince of the Republic and Emperor of its armies, to favor no man, to do and speak impartial justice to all men alike.

"You know what happens to the shirker who sleeps on his post when on sentry-duty about a camp at night in the face of the enemy. If guilty of what you charge any Prefect of the Praetorium deserves not otherwise than such a traitor. I have heard all this man has to say. I did not believe you this morning. I do not disbelieve you now. I do not believe this man, I believe he has been treacherous and that in his dexterous defence just now he lied. Watch me! I turn him over to you."

And, with a really magnificent gesture, he stepped half a pace away from Perennis, stretched out his left arm, the golden baton in his hand, and, with that fatal truncheon, touched him on the shoulder.

The roar that rose was the roar of wild beasts ravening for their prey. The men, packed as they were, somehow surged forward. On the shoulders of their fellow-centurions, a sort of billow of the foremost sergeants rose like surf against a rock; like surf breaking against a rock a sort of foam of them overflowed the front of the platform. For the twinkling of an eye I beheld above this rising tide of executioners the imperious dignity of the Emperor, master of the scene, self-confident and certain that all men would approve of his decision, magnificent in his military trappings; the incredulous amazement of Perennis, his pale, watery blue eyes bleared in his lead-colored, bloodless face, as he stood dazed and numb; the horror of his bedizened wife and sister, both

fleshy women, dark-skinned and normally red-cheeked, now gray with despair, like the two wretched lads beside them; the cruelly feminine relish, as upon the successful fruition of long and tortuous intrigues, blazoned on the faces of Marcia and of Cleander's wife, a very showy woman with golden hair, violet eyes and a delicately pink and white complexion: a similar expression of relished triumph on the broad, fat, ruddy face of her big husband, who looked just what he had been; a man who had started life as a slave; whose master had thought him likely to be most profitably employed as a street porter, in which capacity he had for years carried packs, crates, bales, chests, rafters and such like immensely heavy loads long distances and had thriven on his exertions; who, whatever brains he had since displayed, however much character and merit had contributed to his dazzling rise in life, had retained and still possessed a hearty appetite, a perfect digestion, mighty muscles, hard and solid, all over his hulking frame, and the vast strength of his early prime; all these chief actors framed against a background of gaudily caparisoned officers and courtiers.

In scarcely more than the twinkling of an eye Perennis. was seized by four brawny frontier sergeants and hurled down among the men, among whom he vanished like a lynx under a pack of dogs. I caught no afterglimpse of him nor of his frayed corpse; I descried only a sort of whirlpool of active men about the spot where he had, as it were, sunk into their vortex.

When the flailing arms ceased flailing and the panting executioners stood quiet, the Emperor stretched out his right hand for silence; the rumbling snarls and growls of the mob abated till silence reigned. Into it he spoke:

"You know the custom of our fathers since Numa. The family of a traitor is abolished with him."

There came a second roar of the ravening, ferocious men, a second surge of the foremost up the face of the platform, and, instantly, the sons, wife and sister of Perennis were pushed from it, cast down among the mob, and never reappeared. After the mob quieted a second time Commodus again raised his hand for silence. Quicker than before the men were still. He spoke loud and clear: "You have saved me from a treacherous Prefect of the Praetorium. I have meditated whom to appoint to his vacant post. I have considered well. I now present him to you; my faithful henchman, Cleander of Mazaca, who, by his own deserts, has won citizenship in the Republic, equestrian rank and my favor and gratitude."

The mob cheered.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. III BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXIV THE MASSACRE

Retrospectively, Cleander is talked of, if at all, chiefly as having been brutish, dull, stupid, venal, avaricious and cruel. Cruel and avaricious he certainly became; venal and brutish he certainly seemed; but dull or stupid I cannot admit that he ever was. Indubitably, at the time of his appointment to be Prefect of the Praetorium, he possessed some qualities fitting him, as he later was, to be entrusted by his self-indulgent master with the administration of the whole Empire. Certainly he was quick-thinking, prompt, ingenious, incredibly persuasive, resolute and ruthless, which qualities go far towards equipping a ruler. Without these characteristics he could not have conceived or adopted the plan which he successfully executed.

Commodus caught Cleander's eye, nodded to him and sat down. Confident and smiling, Oleander stepped forward to the platform's railing and addressed us.

"As Prefect of the Praetorium, I am charged with the care of the personal safety of our Prince in his Palace, in the City and wherever he may be. Among measures for his personal safety I rate high the maintenance of discipline and loyalty among his frontier garrisons or their reëstablishment if impaired. By his command you are to return speedily whence you came and tell your fellows of the complete success of your mission. I must be sure that your report will satisfy them, that you set out on your return fully satisfied yourselves. Are you satisfied? I ask your senior sergeant to act as spokesman. After he has spoken I shall give all who desire it the opportunity to speak."

Sextius Baculus at once replied that they were not satisfied while the post of Procurator of Illyricum was held by the eldest son of Perennis, or while he held any office, or, in fact, while he was alive.

Cleander, in a loud, far-carrying voice, apprized the entire assemblage of what Baculus had said, and replied to him:

"From now on I am in charge of all matters pertaining to the personal safety of Caesar, including the apprehension and execution of all traitors and potential traitors. You may rely implicitly on me without suggestions from anyone to take all measures which may be necessary in all such cases. In this case you may feel assured that I have already initiated measures which will infallibly lead to the traitor's return to Italy, without any

unsettlement of the loyalty of the Illyrian garrisons, to his being quietly arrested and as quietly executed. Are you satisfied?"

The answer was a roar of cheers, roar after roar. When the cheering subsided Cleander, three separate times, urged anyone who wished to speak up. No man spoke. Then he said:

"I am commissioned by Caesar to repeat to you explicitly what he has himself partly expressed to you twice today: his appreciation of your fealty and good intentions, his thanks for your good order on your march from Britain and for your having saved him from unsuspected peril, and his gratitude. But please take note and remember that Caesar specially commissions me to say to you that no similar deputation from Britain or from anywhere else will ever be permitted to reach Rome, to enter Italy or even to set out from the posts assigned to its members. Any attempt at such a deputation will be treated, not as well-meant effort to help our Sovereign, but as sacrilegious rebellion against him.

"Also please note that, whereas he has accepted your advice and acted upon it, any further expression of advice from any of you or any future attempt of any legionaries to advise the Emperor will be regarded as an unbearable act of insolence and presumption and dealt with as such. Caesar commands you to be silent and obey.

"Through me he notifies you that your stay at Rome is to be short, that you are, within a few days, under officers appointed by him, to set out on your return march to your Gallic port, there to reëmbark for Britain, there to guard the frontier or keep order in the provinces. As a preparation, for your return march he bids you rest and feast; and, that all may feast, he has lavishly provided food and wine, which you will find ready at your quarters, and with that provision an ample force of cooks and servitors to prepare and distribute your banquet. Caesar now goes to dine and bids you disperse to dine. I have spoken for Caesar. Obey!"

Less heartily, perhaps, but universally, this haughty speech was responded to by loud, tumultuous and long-lasting cheers. More cheers saluted the Emperor when he stood up and followed him till he had vanished with his retinue, at full gallop. The men even continued to cheer until Cleander's wife and Marcia had entered their gilded carriages and been driven off in the wake of the Imperial cortege.

Our evening meal was truly, as Cleander had called it, a feast and a banquet. When we reached our quarters the food was ready and just ready and our repast began at once. It was calculated, in every particular, to induce gluttonous gorging and guzzling. Before

our hunger was really satisfied, before we had more than barely begun to drink the temptingly excellent wine, Agathemer whispered in Greek:

"This banquet is an attempt to make all of us sleep far too soundly. Every man of us will be surfeited with food and fuddled with wine. You and I must be exceptions. Be sure to eat less than you want and to make a mere show of drinking. We must keep awake."

We did, and, in our tent, discussed in whispers our situation.

"North of Nuceria," Agathemer said, "I judged that we should be safer by ourselves than with these fools and rabble, but they kept such close watch on us that the risks of escape were too great. South of Narnia I have judged us better off where we were than if wandering alone. Now whatever the risks of an attempt to escape, whatever the perils we may encounter if we escape, try to escape we must. I have an intuition that this camp is, tonight, the most dangerous spot in all Italy."

We peered out of the tent at intervals; without hindrance or danger, for our tent-mates were utterly asleep. The night was windless and warm. A moon, more than half full, rose about midnight and, as it climbed the sky, shed a pearly light through a veil of mist which deepened and thickened. Near the ground the mist was so thick that it made escape easy, though blundering likely.

We tried to judge our time so as to start a full hour before the first streak of dawn. We traversed unhindered a camp sunk in sleep, where we heard no sound but crapulous snorings. Northward, towards the Mulvian Bridge, we sneaked out into the tomb-lined meadows. Through or above the dense fog we could spy the pinnacles of several vast and ambitious mausoleums glittering in the moon-rays.

We were not a hundred yards from the camp when I dimly perceived ahead of us through the fog something like a wall or stockade about two yards high. A step or two further, at the same moment at which I made out that it was a serried rank of helmetted men, a challenge rang out, sharp and peremptory.

Instantaneously we dropped on our hands and knees and crawled back to camp.

"I told you I had a suspicion that this was a dangerous locality," Agathemer whispered when we had stood up and gotten our breath. "Those were regular infantry of some sort. We can only hope that they are on that side only. Let's try towards Rome."

There, at about the same distance we were similarly challenged.

In camp again Agathemer said:

"Those were Praetorian infantrymen, and they were standing shoulder to shoulder. This looks bad. But I believe in taking every possible chance. Let's try towards the road."

Eastwards also we encountered the like obstacle.

Back we crawled unpursued. As we skurried through the snoring camp, unperceived by the sodden sleepers, Agathemer said, aloud:

"This looks increasingly bad. The Praetorians are standing with interlocked elbows; they look unpleasantly like samples of a complete cordon round the camp. The mounted Praetorians are behind them not two horse-lengths and less than that apart. I divined some sort of troops massed behind the cavalrymen. I feel frightened."

Out we raced towards the broad Tiber, towards it we crept through fog across the meadow. Again we were challenged. The cordon was, apparently, complete.

As we regained the camp Agathemer said:

"If we are to escape alive we need all our craft, and we must be quick."

We sprinted, not to our quarters, but to those of the British veterans.

Into each tent we peered.

Every tent was empty!

Agathemer, plainly, felt in a desperate hurry, yet he took time to glance into the most of the hundred and fifty tents, tearing along past the lines of them. He also took time, after our brief inspection was finished, to pause, get his breath and say:

"This looks worse than bad. I miss my guess if many of these slumberers wake alive. Strip!"

We stripped of everything except our amulet bags.

Then, at full run, stark naked, our unsheathed sheath-knives in our hands, we raced through the fog, now glimmering with the first forehint of coming dawn, along the inner edge of the veterans' tents, till we were opposite the quarters of the tumultuary century formed from the outpourings of the ergastulum, at Nuceria.

Into one of the veterans' tents we went.

"Knife in teeth!" said Agathemer.

The tents were lavishly provided with unsoldierly comforts, a double allowance of blankets and mattresses stuffed with dried reeds or sedge. Motioning me to help, Agathemer doubled a mattress and pressed on it till it lay so. Then he doubled another and set it so that the two were about a yard apart, with their folds towards each other. Another pair he set similarly so that the interval between the folds was over two yards long. Then we roofed the interval, so to speak, with two mattresses laid flat, and laid two more on each of these. Not yet satisfied Agathemer led me out four times to drag in, from the near-by tents, mattresses, two of which we laid lengthwise over the triple mattress-roof, the others we heaped over the end of the roofed tunnel furthest from the opening of the tent.

Then we went outside yet again and cut the ropes of the two adjacent tents and of the one above the pile of mattresses. We threw our knives far away and bunched up the collapsed canvas of that tent so that it formed a sort of continuation of the mattress-roofed tunnel. Then we crawled, feet first, into the tunnel, taking with us two full water-bottles which Agathemer had found in one of the tents and a quarter loaf of bread, left over from the banquet. It smelt appetizing.

We wriggled into the tunnel side by side, until our heads were well under the mattress-roof. We could see out under the huddled, crumpled canvas. Full in our limited view lay, in the middle of the camp street, a fat Nucerian, the outline of his big chest and prominent paunch dimly visible in the increasing light. His gurgling snores were plainly audible.

Agathemer broke off two fragments of the bread and we munched ruminatively.

We had hardly swallowed three mouthfuls when Agathemer exclaimed:

"Just in time! I can hear the arrows already! Listen!"

We listened. I could hear a sound as of hail on roofs. And, just above us, I could hear the arrows plunge into our protecting mound with a swishing, rending thud.

"We ought to be safe," Agathemer whispered. "But we may get skewered even as we are. Volleyed arrows drive deep."

I heard many a volley and, after the first, since I was listening for it, I heard faintly before each volley the deep boom of thousands of powerful bows, twanging all at the same instant.

As the light increased I could see the drunken Nucerian with his hummocky outline emphasized by five feathered arrows planted in his body. He must have been killed by any of the five.

When we saw living men pass across our outlook, their legs looked like those of some sort of foreign auxiliaries. I made the conjecture, from their movements, that they were killing the merely wounded. Certainly, one of them drove his long sword through the prostrate, arrow-skewered Nucerian; and, sometime later, another, with quite a different type of leg-coverings, did the like.

After daylight we saw pass by the legs of many Praetorian infantrymen and of some cavalrymen. From the second hour we saw only legs of some novel sort of regular soldiery whose trappings neither of us could recognize.

It grew hot in our hiding place. We talked in whispers; while talking we seemed more indifferent to the heat.

Agathemer said:

"All this must have been planned beforehand and carefully and very skillfully carried out. It took ingenuity, minutely detailed arrangements and great skill to arrange that banquet so as to get all the tumultuary additions to the deputation surfeited and dead drunk and yet keep the veteran legionaries near enough to being sober to be waked up, marshalled and marched out. And it took amazing eloquence to wheedle their centurions into abandoning their invited associates. The whole thing is a miracle. I can't see through it."

I may interpolate here, what I learned more than four years later, after Cleander's downfall and death and after my return from Africa, that Agathemer's conjectures, as we talked the matter over in our nook, were correct. Perennis had formulated the plan and had prepared for it and given the preliminary orders. His was the policy of allowing the mutineers to march all the way to Rome unhindered. He, without consulting the Emperor and with every care to prevent him from suspecting what was afoot, imported a thousand archers from Crete, and as many mounted bowmen from Numidia, from Mauretania and from Gaetulia. He planned the banquet-feast, he made arrangements for the cordon of Praetorians. The massacre was his idea.

Cleander must have known of all this; he could not, like Commodus, be kept in ignorance. Either before he came to our camp, or, perhaps, in his elation at his rival's ruin and his own success, he adopted the ready plan. Most likely the separation from their fellows of the veteran mutineers was all his own idea; Perennis was not the man to carry out so bold a stroke nor so much as to conceive of it. Indubitably, after dark, the eighteen veteran sergeants were secretly called to a meeting with Cleander. The fellow must have possessed superhuman powers of persuasion. Certainly he made a long speech in which he convinced the leaders of the mutineers that their having associated with themselves tumultuary recruits in Gaul and the liberated inmates of ergastula in Italy was inconsistent with their expressed loyalty to Caesar and the Commonwealth; that by such action, they had gravely imperilled the very existence of the Republic and the safety of their Emperor. He won them over so completely that they acceded, without hesitation, to his dictum that they ought to do all in their power to repair the ill effects of their error of judgment; that the only way was to abandon their associates, to leave them for him to deal with and to march with all speed back to Britain to reassure their fellow-insurgents and reclaim Britain to effective loyalty.

So completely were they under his spell that they returned to their camp, roused their men without waking any of their tumultuary associates, and marched the whole body of veterans, in the night, across the Mulvian Bridge and on all day to a prepared camp near Careiae, where they spent the night. From there they marched in two days the forty-six miles to Cosa; whence they followed the Aurelian road to Marseilles, as we had ridden it, and from there marched across Gaul to Gessoriacum and shipped for Britain, all in half the time in which they had come.

Agathemer and I spent the whole day in our hiding place, suffering terribly from the heat, for the day was hot, muggy and breezeless, so that the still sultry air was stifling. We spared our water-bottles and made their contents last. Our bread we munched relishingly after noon.

Before sunset we were discovered and unearthed by some of the infantry whose trappings were unknown to us. We found out later that they belonged to the newly-enlisted Viarii, cohorts created from picked young men judged agile, alert, intelligent and loyal, to act as a special road-constabulary to deal with robbers and especially with the bands obeying the King of the Highwaymen and with him.

Our captors did not treat us roughly, though they bound our hands behind us effectually. They laughed over our device for escaping the arrows and commented on our cleverness. Our amulet-bags they ignored, being more interested in our brand-marks and scourge-scars. Their sergeant asked us where we were from.

"Do you think it likely," Agathemer laughed, "that we would tell you; can't you read on our backs that, wherever we came from it is the last place on earth we want to go back to?"

The sergeant laughed genially.

"Mark 'em 'unidentified'," he ordered.

They clothed us in tunics innocent of any blood-stains, but which, we felt sure, had been taken from the corpses of our late associates.

"Put 'em with the rest," the sergeant ordered.

With the rest, some three hundred survivors out of more than three thousand tumultuaries, we were herded inside a convoy of constabulary and marched in the dusk and dark to our former camp at Rubrae. There we were liberally fed on what was, apparently, the leavings from the entertainment afforded the mutineers there on their down-march.

Next morning we were lined up and inspected by a superior officer with two orderlies and two secretaries. As he passed down the rank in which Agathemer and I stood he eyed us keenly. After a time he returned and said:

"These two rascals are trying to keep together. Separate them!"

Thereafter I saw no more of Agathemer for over four years.

I do not wish to dwell on my wretchedness, after we were parted. Alone among riffraff, I was very miserable. I mourned for the faithful fellow and knew he mourned for me. I longed for him as keenly as if he had been my twin-brother.

I and my fellows were marched on under close convoy, up the Flaminian Highway and the batch among which I was, was cast into the ergastulum at Nuceria.

There I passed a miserable winter. Our prison was not unlike the ergastulum at Placentia; ill-designed, damp, cold, filthy, swarming with vermin and crowded with wretches like myself. I was despondent in my loneliness and found harder to bear my shiverings, my fitful half-sleep in my foul infested bunk, the horrible food, the grinding labor, the stripes and blows and insults of the guards and overseers and the jeers of my inhuman fellow-sufferers. This time I had no chance of becoming cook's- helper or of

easing my circumstances in any other manner. I spent the entire winter haggard for sleep, underclad, underfed, overworked, shivering, beaten and abused.

Conditions in that ergastulum were more than amazing. It was so utterly mismanaged that, in fact, very little effective work was done, though the inmates were roused early, set to their tasks before they could really see, lashed all day, given but a very brief rest at noon and released only after dusk. Half the prisoners judiciously directed could have ground twice as much grain. As it was, the superintendent and overseers had far less real authority than a sort of dictator elected or selected or tolerated by the rabble. He had a sort of senate of the six most ruffianly of the prisoners. These seven ruled the ergastulum and their power was effective for overworking and underfeeding, even more than the generality, those whom they disliked, and for diminishing the labors and increasing the rations of their favorites. The existence of this secret government among the rabble was in itself astonishing, its methods yet more so.

Unlike the ergastulum at Placentia the watch at the ergastulum at Nuceria was very lax and haphazard. It was effective at keeping us in; there were but three escapes all winter. But communication with the outside world was fairly easy and was kept up unceasingly. Many of the inmates had friends among the slaves of Nuceria. The gate-guards were so remiss that, daily, one or more outsiders entered our prison and left when they pleased. The henchmen of the dictator even managed to slip out and spend an hour or more where they pleased in the city. This, however, was possible only if they returned soon, for the superintendent was keen on calling us over three times a day.

Through the activities of those inmates who arranged to get out and return, and of their friends who entered and left, since the weighers of the grain and flour were careless and their inspectors negligent, the dictator and his friends drove a regular and profitable trade in stolen flour, which they exchanged for wine, oil, dainties, stolen clothing and such other articles as they desired; they even sold much of it for cash, and not only the dictator but each of the six senators had a hoard of coins, not merely coppers, but broad silver pieces.

In this traffic and its advantages I had no share. In fact, of all his fellows, I think the dictator hated me most; certainly he bullied me, made my lot harder in countless petty ways, and abused and insulted me constantly.

After mid-winter I became aware of a traffic not only in dainties and wine, but in implements and weapons. Many daggers and knives were smuggled into the ergastulum, not a few files. The senators had a small arsenal of old swords, regular infantry swords, rusty but dangerous. Gradually I heard whispers of a plot. The conspirators were to file through the bars of more than one window, plastering up the filed places with filth and

earth to conceal the filing, leaving a thread of metal to hold the filed bars in place. Then, when all was ready, they planned to murder the guards, overseers and superintendent, break out, sack the town-arsenal, loot shops and mansions, and then, well-clad and fully armed, take to the mountains and join the bands of the King of the Highwaymen. Two of the senators claimed to have been men of his before their incarceration and promised to lead the rest to the haunts of his brigands.

The date set for their attempt was the fourteenth day before the Kalends of April, a few days before the Vernal Equinox. My gorge rose at the idea of the burning and sacking of Nuceria, even at the slaughter of our cruel guards, overseers and superintendent. The more I thought the matter over the less I liked the prospect. I had every reason to hate the dictator and senators. I saw no likelihood of betterment for myself if I were carried off with these riffraff as one of a band of looters, murderers and outlaws, loose in the forests.

I contrived to disclose the plot to the prison authorities. As a result the ergastulum was entered by the town guards, rigorously searched by the aldermen and their apparitors, under the aldermen's eyes, all the sawn bars, files, knives, daggers and swords discovered, the suspected men tortured till the ring-leaders were identified, the dictator and his senators flogged and manacled, and the management of the ergastulum renovated.

I was conducted from the prison, given a bath, clothed in a clean, warm tunic and cloak, provided with good shoes, abundantly fed and put to sleep in a clean bed in the house of a freedman who watched closely that I did not escape, but did everything to make me comfortable.

The next day the chief alderman of Nuceria interrogated me at the town hall, praised me, declared that I had saved the town many horrors and much damage and loss, and asked me what reward I craved.

I answered, boldly, that what I craved was what all slaves craved: freedom.

He replied that, in his opinion, I had merited manumission; but that I was not the property of the municipality of Nuceria, but of the fiscus; [Footnote: See Note B.] I was, in short, part of the personal property of the Emperor and could be manumitted only by the Emperor, or by one of his legal representatives. Such a manumission would be difficult to arrange and its arrangement would take a long time. He would set to work to try to arrange for it. Meantime, could I not ask some reward within their power to grant?

I at once replied that I desired above all things never to be returned to that ergastulum.

This he promised immediately, saying that recommitment there would be equivalent to a sentence of torture and death, since my late associates, infuriated at my treachery, as they named it, would certainly inflict on me all the torments their malignity could suggest and keep on till I died. He added that he and the other aldermen had never meant to recommit me; deliverance from that ergastulum. they considered part of my reward and that the least part of it. What else did I desire?

"If," said I, "I must remain a slave and, remaining the property of Caesar, must be employed as the administration of the fiscus direct, at least try to arrange that I be employed out of doors far from any town, on a slave farm, or at herding or wood-cutting or charcoal-burning. I have heard that many of Caesar's slave-gangs are busy afield, on farms, or pasture-lands or in the forests."

"That," said the alderman, "will be easy. Afield you shall go—even far afield. Do you like horses? Can you manage horses?"

"I love all animals," I said, "and most particularly horses."

"Then," said the alderman, "I have already in mind the very place for you, where none of your rancorous late associates can ever find you, on an Imperial stock-farm or breeding-ranch in the uplands, among the forested mountains. Would you consider it a reward, would you consider it the fulfillment of your wish to be transferred from our town ergastulum, where you were as an Imperial slave rented out to our city, to such an Imperial estate, where you will be directly under the employees of the fiscus?"

"I certainly should feel rewarded," I said, "by such a transfer."

"In addition," he concluded, "we shall present you with a new tunic and cloak and new shoes, also an extra tunic, and with a purse containing ten silver pieces."

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. III BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXV THE OPEN COUNTRY

After some days of rest, abundant food and leisurely hot-baths in the freedman's house, I left Nuceria under convoy of three genial road-constables and journeyed deliberately northward along the Flaminian Highway to the Imperial estate which was to be my abode. I am not going to locate it precisely nor to name the villages nearest it nor the neighboring towns. It will be quite sufficient to set down that it was near the Flaminian Highway and approximately half way between Nuceria and Forum Sempronii.

My reasons for vagueness are mandatory, to my mind. Feuds in the Umbrian mountains differ greatly from feuds in the Sabine hills; but, like Sabinum, Umbria is afflicted with feuds. Now I anticipate that this book will not only be widely read among our nobility and gentry and much discussed by them, but also that it will be talked of by more than half Rome and that copies of it and talk about it will spread all over Italy and even into the provinces. Talk of it may trickle into the Umbrian mountains. Umbrian mountaineers live long. Some of those who loved me and befriended me or loved and befriended those who loved and befriended me, may still be alive and hearty and likely to live many years yet. So also may be some of those who hated me. I do not want anyone holding a grudge, or nursing the grudge of a dead kinsman or friend, to learn through me of any secret kindness to me which he might regard as treachery to his kin and so feel impelled to avenge on those who befriended me or their children or grandchildren. Umbrian enmities ramify incredibly and endure from generation to generation. I remember with gratitude many Umbrians who were kind to me; I would not, however, indirectly cause any trouble to them in their old age, or to their descendants.

The Imperial estate was large and I learned its history. It was made up of three adjacent properties confiscated at different periods by different Emperors. One had fallen to the fiscus under Nero, a second under Domitian, and a third under Trajan, each as the result of its owner being implicated in a conspiracy against the Emperor. The administration of the resultant large estate was a perfect sample of the excellent management in detail and stupid misjudgment in general so common under the fiscus. The estate was hilly, some of it mountainous, and quite unfitted for horse-breeding, which is best engaged in, as everybody knows, on estates composed chiefly of wide-spreading plains or gently rolling country with broad, flat meadows. Good judgment would have put this estate chiefly in forest, with a few cattle, some sheep and more goats, but no horses. As I found it, it had, to be sure, many goats, but almost as many

sheep and cattle, and horses almost as numerous as the cattle and far more important, for to their breeding most of the efforts of the overseer were directed.

The overseer's house was the best of the three original villas. About it were ample, commodious and scrupulously clean quarters for slaves like me. Also it had yards for fowls, ducks, geese, guinea-fowls, and peacocks, arranged before the confiscation and allowed since to run down, but still productive and fairly well-filled with birds, as were the big dovecotes. Besides, there were fish ponds and a rabbit-warren, left from the former villa. There were extensive stables, cattle-sheds and pens, sheep-folds, goat-runs and pig-sties adjoining the house. In the quarters I found a goodly company of hearty, healthy, contented slaves, sty-wards, goatherds, shepherds, cowmen and horse-wranglers. These were friendly from my first arrival among them, seemed to look me over deliberately and appraise me, and appeared to like me.

I was first sent out as one of two assistants to an experienced herder in charge of a rather large herd of beef-steers. We drove them up the mountains to a grassy glade and, when they had eaten down the grass there, to another. Our duties were light, as the steers were not very wild or fierce and were easy to keep together, to keep in motion by day and to keep stationary by night. Each night two of us slept by a smouldering fire and the third circled about the herd as the steers lay sleeping or chewing their cuds. The circling was done at the horse's slowest walk. Our horses were good, our food good, and my two companions genial, though reticent.

Only once did any of our charges bolt. Then, when we missed three steers, our senior asked me:

"Do you think you could find them and fetch them back?"

On my affirming confidence that I could he smiled doubtfully, and shook his head, but drawled:

"I'll give you the chance, just to try you out."

I found the runaways with no trouble whatever, for their trail was nowhere faint, turned them easily and brought them back, manifestly, much sooner than he had hoped. He appeared pleased, but merely grunted.

Yet he must have spoken well of me to the superintendent, for after a day's rest in the slave-quarters I was assigned the sole care of a small bunch of young cows with their first calves. It seemed to be assumed that I would make no attempt to escape. As I had

been given a good horse and a serviceable rain-cloak, I had thoroughly enjoyed my life from the start.

The landscape was charming, the climate agreeable, spring was approaching, I was out in the open air, camping at night by a fire wherever my charges lay down to sleep, eating what I chose of the ample supply of good food which I carried in my saddle-bags. I was happy, thoroughly happy, and I throve from my arrival. I still mourned for Agathemer, but I did not miss him as acutely as I had in the ergastulum.

After about ten days in the woodland glades I brought my charges back to the villa for inspection, according to orders. The inspector was pleased with their condition and commended me. Some of the fellow-herdsmen, off duty, stood or sat about and they seemed to approve.

One of them asked:

"Have much trouble, Greenhorn?"

"Not a bit," I answered.

"How'd you like to try to milk one of those cows?" another enquired.

"I can milk any one of them," I replied. "I have milked most of them. I've been drinking all the milk I could hold all the while I was out with them."

"That's the silliest lie I ever heard," they chorused. "Why, if you tried to handle any one of those cows she'd gore you to death. You couldn't get near enough to the udder of any one of them to get your hand on her teats. Invent a lie we can swallow, or quit bragging. You can't fool us."

I kept my temper, scaled the enclosure of the cow-pen, being careful not to make any sudden movement, strolled to the nearest cow, stroked her nose, pulled her ears, walked down her flank, patting her as I went and handled her udder.

"What have you to say now?" I called to the gaping yokels.

"Try that on another," they shouted back.

I did the like with two more.

They were dumb.

"Hand me a crock," I called, "and I'll get a quart or so of milk, if the calves have left any."

When, one handed me a small olla I milked it more than half-full from a dozen cows. I exhibited the milk, offered it to them, and, on their laughingly replying that they were no milk-sops, they preferred wine, I drank most of it. Then I went to the nearest calf, gentled it, picked it up, lifted it onto my back, its legs sticking out in front of me across my shoulders, and paced back and forth along the inside of the fence, the mother following me, licking the calf and lowing, but mild and with no show of anger, let alone any threat of attack on me.

Before I put the calf down the superintendent came along.

"What's all this?" he queried.

"Felix here," he was answered, "is a sort of wizard. He can gentle these cows, he can milk them, and he has been showing off how one will let him carry her calf and yet not get excited."

"Can you do as well with bulls, too?" the Villicus enquired.

"I think so," I replied. I had put down the calf and climbed out of the cow-pen.

"Come along!" the Villicus commanded.

We trooped off to a pen where there was a fine breeding-bull all alone.

"Get inside, lad!" said the Villicus; "that is, if you dare. But be sure you are ready to vault out again, and entirely able to clear the pen."

I climbed into the pen and stood. The bull gazed at me, but made no threatening movement and his demeanor was placid. I walked up to him, a pace at a time, patted his nose, pulled his ears, walked round him, stroking him, took hold of the ring in his nose and led him over toward the awestruck gapers:

When I climbed out of the pen one man said:

"Try him on old Scrofa."

We trooped off to the hog-pens and there was a six or eight-year-old sow with a young litter. She was a huge beast, as ugly a sow as ever I saw. I got into her pen, miring half to

my knees in its filth, but keeping my feet. She made no move to attack me, but grunted enquiringly. I picked up one of her pigs, it hardly squealed and she grunted scarcely more than she had already. I dangled the piglet before her, and she only smelt it and kept on grunting, with no sign of wrath.

"Come out, Felix," the Villicus drawled, "you are sow-proof. But how do you do it?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but I have always been able to gentle fierce animals of any kind. No animal ever attacks me."

Thereupon he tried me with three rams famous for butting, two he-goats of even worse reputation and half a score of watch-dogs. I came unscathed from close companionship with the goats and rams, and the dogs behaved as if they had been my pets from their puppyhood.

"Can you do as well with horses?" the Villicus enquired.

"I believe so," I replied; "give me a chance."

"I shall," he asserted. "I'll round up all our colts fit for breaking and try you on them. I'll get in most of the boys to watch the fun. It'll take about ten days to get ready. Meanwhile you can take out another bunch of heifers with new calves. It seems to suit you and the calves and the heifers."

When I returned from my third outing, hard and fit and happy, the Villicus asked me how soon I would be ready for colt-breaking.

"Tomorrow," I said.

The next day was made a sort of festival, with all the horse-herders at the villa paddocks.

First of all four experienced horse-wranglers roped a filly, threw her, bitted and bridled her while one sat on her head, let her get on her feet, hobbled her, held her so while two more saddled her and then held her while one mounted her. When they let her go she reared, bucked, dashed about, bucked again and again, and continued till exhaustion forced her to quiet down and obey her rider, who had kept his seat from the first.

"What do you think of that, Felix?" the Villicus asked me.

"As good horse-wrangling as can be seen anywhere," I replied. "Up to standard and even above normal. But I can do better."

"Bold words," said the Villicus; "we'll give you a chance to prove them."

Another filly was roped, bitted, bridled, and saddled, and her captors invited me to mount.

"Pooh!" said I. "Let some one else ride her. I don't need all those preliminaries. I can walk right out into that bunch of colts, catch any young stallion you point out, hold him by the nose, gentle him without any rope or thong on him, mount him by vaulting onto his back, and ride him about unbitted, unbridled, bareback, and as I please, without his rearing or backing or kicking."

"Son," said the Villicus, "you are either a lunatic or a demigod. Go in and try what you boast you can do. Show us."

"Point out your stallion," I suggested.

He indicated a beautiful bay with a white face. He let me approach him at my first attempt, let me take him by the nose, let me lead him close to my dumbfounded audience, let me mount him. I rode him about, turning him to right or left as the Villicus ordered, at my suggestion. When I got off I lifted each of his hoofs in succession, crawled under his belly, crawled between his fore-legs, and then between his hind-legs, while the onlookers held their breath; finally I stood behind him, slapped his rump and pulled his tail.

"Is he broken?" I queried.

"Apparently he is gentle as a lamb to you," the Villicus admitted, "but how about the rest of us?"

"Bring in a saddle and bridle," I suggested, "and I'll bit him and hold him while two of you saddle him and until one of you mounts him. He should be no more dangerous than a roped filly."

They did as I suggested and I then rode him about until he appeared used to the saddle and bit and already, at once, bridle-wise. Then one of the wranglers rode him.

I gentled colt after colt all that day till sunset, with a very brief pause for food and rest. Also I kept it up next day until mid-afternoon, when the last colt had been tamed.

Then, as we stood breathing, one of the horse-wranglers suggested:

"Try him on Selinus."

"That would be plain murder," one of the others cried.

"I am not so sure," the Villicus ruminated. "I am almost ready to feel that he might even tame Selinus."

Off we trooped to the stable of the choice breeding-stallions. There, in a darkened box-stall, I was shown a beautiful demon of a horse, four years old, a sorrel, with a white face and white forefeet. He certainly looked wicked enough.

"Will you try him?" the Villicus asked me.

"Of course," I said. "Let him out into the yard or the paddock."

Into the paddock he was let out, by means of a door in his stall worked by winches from above. In the afternoon sunlight he pranced and curvetted about, a joy to see.

"Let me show Felix what he is like," one of the younger horse-wranglers suggested.

"You can," the Villicus agreed. "We all know how agile you are and how quick at vaulting a fence."

The fellow vaulted into the paddock when Selinus was at its further corner. The moment the beast saw him he charged at full-run, screaming like an angry gander, the picture of a man-killer, ears laid back, nostrils wide and red, mouth open, teeth bared, forehoofs lashing out high in front, an equine fury. The lad vaulted the fence handily when Selinus was not three yards from him and the brute pawed angrily at the palings and bit them viciously.

"Want to try, Felix?" the Villicus asked me again.

Without a word I vaulted the enclosure within two yards of Selinus. He stood, ears cocked forward, nostrils quiet, mouth shut, all four hoofs on the ground, quivering all over.

Inch by inch I neared him till my hand touched him. He trembled like an aspen-leaf, but did not attack me.

"Hercules be good to us all!" exclaimed one of the men.

After that I did with Selinus all I had done with the first stallion-colt, gentling him, leading him by the nose, mounting him, riding him, crawling under his belly, between his fore-legs and hind-legs, pulling his tail, slapping him liberally all over. Then, timidly, urged by their comrades' jeers, the two wranglers whom I invited brought me a saddle and bridle and I bitted him and held him while they saddled. Then I rode him.

Afterwards, with much misgiving, but shamed into boldness, the chief horse-wrangler mounted him and rode him.

Selinus was tamed!

"Felix," said the Villicus, "you are too valuable to set to herding cattle. You are henceforward chief horse-wrangler of this estate. I'll give you a house all to yourself and a girl to keep house for you. When not horse taming here or wherever I lend you out, you can spend your time as you please."

The onlookers acclaimed his award and the displaced chief horse-wrangler shook hands with me and declared that he was proud to be second to such a wonder as "Felix the Wizard."

After that I lived a life of ease. My dwelling was a neat cottage well shaded with fine trees and bowered in climbing vines, with a tiny courtyard, a not too tiny atrium with a hearth, a kitchen, a store-room and two bed-rooms. It was as clean as possible and well furnished for a slave's quarters. The girl and I liked each other at first sight. I am not going to tell her name, but a jest we had between us led me to call her by the pet name of Septima. If she had been a free-woman, she would have been described as a young widow. Her former mate, one of the horse-wranglers, had been killed by Selinus the previous autumn. Their child, not a year old, had died before his father. Septima had recovered from her grief during the winter and had become normally cheerful before she was assigned to me. I found her constitutionally merry, very good company, always diligent, a surpassing cook, magical with the garden, especially with her beloved flowers, a capable needle-woman, always neat, and very good- looking. We got on famously together.

With her beehives only, Septima had trouble. She understood bees perfectly, but was afraid of them, and with reason, for she was manifestly obnoxious to bees and was far too often stung. Of course, bees, like all other living creatures, were mild to me. I tended her hives, under her supervision, for I knew nothing of bees; according to her directions I captured several swarms for her. Also I, when the time came, removed combs from such hives as she designated.

Spring was in its full glory and I felt the exhilaration of it. Each home-coming was a delight. And I was much away, for the Villicus had me convoyed about the countryside to every estate which possessed an unbroken colt or an intractable horse. I gentled successfully every one I encountered.

After all the bad horses and raw colts for miles around had been tamed I spent some days idling about my cottage and getting acquainted with it and with Septima. But within not many days I grew restive. I told the Villicus I wanted something to do.

"Well," he said, "five steers have eluded one of my herd-gangs and no one can find them. Question the men (he named them) so as to get the right start, and try your luck."

I was off, trailing those five steers, for three days and two nights. By sunset of the third day I had them back at the villa.

After that I was called on to hunt down and round up all stampeded cattle and all strays, whether cattle, horses, goats, sheep or swine. I enjoyed my lone outings and between them basked contentedly in the comfort of my cottage and the amenity of Septima's cheeriness. During my stays at home I thoroughly familiarized myself with the villa, its outbuildings and all their inhabitants. Also I put a good deal of time on Selinus, whom I transformed from an insane man-killer into one of the gentlest stallions I ever heard of. I taught him all the niceties of obedience acclaimed in perfect parade horses till he would stand, sidle, back, sidle diagonally, curvet and execute all the show-steps promptly at the signalling touch or sound. I tamed him till he would let anybody gentle him, till it was perfectly safe for anyone to ride him. I even trusted Septima on him and he justified my confidence in my training of him and in him. In fact, from being a man-killer who had to be kept penned up in the dark, whom not even the boldest horse-master dare approach, he became so gentle and so trustworthy that he could be let run at large, mild to all human beings, even to strangers.

He grew to love me like a pet dog, followed me about when I was not riding him, and would come to me from far away to a call or gesticulation; and he could see me and recognize me at such distances that I revised my notions as to the powers of sight possessed by horses, for I had held the common opinion that no horse can see clearly or definitely any object at all far from him. Selinus repeatedly saw and recognized me a full half-mile away and galloped to me, approaching with every demonstration of joy.

During my horse-wrangling expeditions and my excursions after wandering stock I had grown well acquainted with the country-side and its inhabitants. I was on terms of comradeship with all my fellow-slaves, of easy sociability with the yeomanry; while I was

treated by the overseers, the Villicus, and inspectors with marked consideration. Thus I rapidly learnt all there was to know of the idiosyncrasies of the locality, since everybody seemed to trust me and no one held aloof or was reticent with me.

I found conditions in the Umbrian mountains as amazing, as incredible as in the ergastulum at Nuceria. There the two vital facts were the negligence and impotence of the warders and the secret system for cheating and thwarting them. Here all the thoughts of slaves, peasants and yeomen on the one hand, and of overseers, inspectors and landowners on the other, pivoted on the existence in the district of a post of road-constabulary on the lookout for bandits and of a camp of brigands owing allegiance to the King of the Highwaymen.

The wealthy proprietors, the gentlemanly landowners, the inspectors of the Estate, its Villicus and his overseers all suspected the presence of the bandits and were doing all they could to assist the road-constabulary to locate them, pounce on them and capture them. Their efforts were completely futile. Neither any of the constabulary nor any of the well-to-do persons who sided with them, could ever get an inkling of the location of the outlaws' various camps nor was any of them ever able to be really sure that bandits were actually within a few miles. For the whole body of yeomanry, peasants and slaves, even the slaves of those proprietors keenest on the scent of the brigands and most eager to nab them, were leagued to bamboozle, thwart and oppose their masters and betters, and to aid the outlaws, to keep them posted on everything said and proposed by the loyal inhabitants, and to assist them in outwitting the authorities, the constabulary and all persons who sided with them. In this they were notably successful.

It is my keen recollection of this condition of things which determines me to omit from this part of my narrative all names of persons and places. The generality of the population made a sort of religion out of their complicity with the outlaws. They took an almost religious pride in cooperating with them and in antagonizing their adversaries. They hated all the adversaries of the outlaws, whether landowners, constabulary or inspectors. But, above all, they loathed, abhorred, abominated and detested with a white-hot animosity any yeoman, peasant or slave who failed to do all in his power to foster the interests of the outlaws; regarding such persons, male or female, as traitors to the cause of the populace. Especially did they cherish an envenomed and malignant grudge against anyone who actually sided with the constabulary, gave them information or betrayed the outlaws: or even against anyone who helped or shielded any such informer.

As I was the means of spoiling the long-prepared and much-hoped for coup on which the robbers had set their highest hopes, as not a few men and women assisted me with information, aided me in other ways and protected me afterwards, I dare not name any

names for fear that some survivor or some son or grandson of some participant in these doings might learn through me of long suspected but never verified treason to the unwritten law of the country-side and might bloodily avenge it on a surviving helper of mine or on any such helper's children or grandchildren. The Umbrian mountaineers are spleenful, tenacious of a grudge and ferociously acrimonious.

I learnt all these amazing facts without difficulty, for slaves, peasants and yeoman alike assumed that I was of their party and was heart and soul with the outlaws. I was not subject to suspicion because I visited the post of the constabulary, became acquainted with every man of them, their sergeants and their officers and frequented their company. All the yeomen, peasants and slaves whose abodes were near the post, were, on the surface, on the best of terms with the road-constables; pretended to help them with information, retailing to them as rumors all sorts of inventions calculated to throw them off the scent of the outlaws, always with an air of the friendliest good-will; and loitered, idling about the post, chatting of local gossip.

I was so entirely trusted that I was taken to the outlaws' camp and made acquainted with the entire band. Paradoxically the members of the band were all hulking burly ruffians of twenty-five to thirty-five years, whereas their chief, while big and brawny enough, was inferior in size to any of his subordinates and younger by six full years than the youngest of them. To him I was boisterously presented as a brother, for his name also was Felix. In fact, he was the man since famous as Felix Bulla, for long the most redoubtable outlaw in Italy. Then he was hardly more than a lad, for all his bulk and strength and ferocity. He had been appointed chief of the band by the King of the Highwaymen in person, who held him in the warmest regard for his ruthlessness, courage, skill, and cunning, especially for his cunning, rating him, as I was told by all the band, and having proclaimed him to them, as the most subtle and crafty outlaw alive after himself.

Bulla, like everybody else, appeared to take to me and treated me as an equal, after conversing with me for hours at a time. I was always a welcome guest at any of the bandits' camps and they often made me show off my admired powers on fox-cubs, badgers, weasels and other such wild creatures which they or their peasant friends had trapped alive. My ability to tame, handle, fondle and make tractable to anyone such animals appeared a source of unflagging interest and unceasing entertainment to these ruffians.

As I was allowed to dispose of my time as I chose, whenever I was not busy rounding up strayed stock or taming raw colts, I had plenty of leisure to ride about the country-side, make friends, get intimate with the constabulary and the outlaws and idle many of my days as appeared most pleasant. I took full advantage of my partial liberty.

The weather, from my arrival at the Imperial estate, was mostly fine and often glorious. Spring came early and merged beautifully into summer. I enjoyed myself hugely. Besides local peculiarities and the humors of the tacit league to thwart the constabulary and foster the interests of the outlaws, I derived much entertainment from the traffic on the Flaminian Highway. Of course, there were Imperial couriers, travellers of all sorts, and convoys of every kind of goods, long strings of wagons, carts or pack- mules laden with wheat, other grains, wine, oil, flax, charcoal, firewood, ingots of bronze, lead or iron, and countless other commodities on their way to Rome; or convoys of clothing, hangings, furniture, utensils and the like, going northwards from the City.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL. III BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXVI THE OUTLAWS

From early spring, however, all this normal traffic was interfered with, delayed, hindered and even totally blockaded by column after column of wains and wagons passing southwards, huge wagons, drawn by six or eight or even ten horses or mules or by as many big long-horned white oxen, every wagon laden with a cage or two or more cages containing beasts being conveyed to the Colosseum in Rome. This amazing procession roused my interest as soon as it began to pass; filling, clogging, blocking the highway and continuing without intermission day after day, ceasing its movement, indeed, each night, but making the roadside almost a continuous camp of teamsters and caretakers, barely half of them sleeping, the moiety busy about their draft-cattle or the cages of their charges.

The endless stream of caravans amazed me. I had seen beast-fights without number in the Colosseum, but had never thought of the enormous labor and expense incident on the preparations for even one morning's exhibition of, say, a hundred lions and other beasts in proportion. Now I meditated over the thousands of trappers and other hunters who must scour the forests of Dacia, Moesia, Thrace, Illyricum, Pannonia, Noricum, Rhaetia and Germany to gather such a supply of beasts for exhibition. I saw wolves, bears and boars by the thousand, and hundreds of lynxes, elk and wild bulls, both the strange forest-bisons, unlike our cattle, with low rumps and high shoulders and their horns turned downwards and forwards, parallel to each other, and the huger and even fiercer bulls, much like farm bulls, but larger, taller and leaner and with horns incredibly long, so that their tips were often two yards and more apart. I had no idea of the vast numbers of such beasts which were yearly poured into Rome from all the mountains and forests to the north and east of the Alps. I was amazed.

Even more was I amazed to see hundreds upon hundreds of cages containing beasts not from northern Europe, but from Africa, or even from Asia: lions without number, panthers and leopards by the hundred, many tigers, antelopes of all kinds by scores of each kind, rhinoceroses, and hippopotami in enormous cages on gigantic wains drawn by twelve yoke of oxen; even a dozen huge gray elephants pacing sedately, their turbaned mahouts rocking on their necks.

I knew that the traffic in beasts from the northern forests concentrated at Aquileia and I had a hazy notion that they were customarily shipped from there by sea round Italy and through the straits to the Tiber. My curiosity was excited as to why they were now

coming overland instead of going by sea. Still more was I curious as to why these hordes of animals from the south should be traversing Italy from the north.

I asked questions and could get no satisfaction from the natives of the district: slaves, peasants, yeomen, proprietors, overseers, Villicus and all, they one and all knew nothing. If they claimed to know, what they alleged merely emphasized their ignorance.

The constabulary knew, but were inclined to be reticent and, when they spoke, were laconic. Yet their briefest utterances contained hints which confirmed the only fact I had elicited from the natives: namely, that this traffic was not only unusual along the Flaminian Highway, but had never been seen on it before; was a complete novelty, even a portent. They also confirmed my impression that few animals destined for beast-fights in the amphitheatres reached Rome overland; as I had thought, practically all had hitherto come by sea and up the Tiber.

Still curious, I made friends with the teamsters. Some were from Ravenna, and even these grumbled at the two hundred and fifty miles as ruinous to their cattle. The animals they convoyed had come overland from Aquileia to Altinum and from there to Ravenna by sea. In this way had come the crocodiles, hippopotami and rhinoceroses.

More teamsters were from Aquileia itself. Some of these with the lighter wagons for the cages containing wolves, lynxes, small antelopes, hyenas or African apes, had been able to take the shorter though poorer road by way of Patavium and Ateste to Bononia, which made their total journey under five hundred and twenty miles. But most, including all those conveying bears, boars, panthers, leopards, lions or tigers, had come by the more northerly road through Verona. Those with panthers, leopards or small stags had come from Verona, by way of Hostilia to Bononia and from there southward as did all, making their journey about five hundred and fifty miles; the men conveying cages of tigers, lions, bears, boars, elk, or wild bulls had mostly come from Verona through Cremona; from there some through Regio to Bononia, others through Placentia; and for these their total teaming did not differ much, about six hundred and twenty miles for the ones and ten miles more for the others. Teams tugging wains carrying the heaviest cages containing unusually large elk, boars, bears or bulls, had had to go by way of Milan and had been put to it to keep their teams fit for a journey of over seven hundred miles.

Besides the difference in weight of the loads, chiefly depending on the needed strength of the cages, I found that their divergence of routes was due, in part, to the efforts which the procurator of all this teaming had made to avoid choking the roads. The teamsters averred that they knew nothing as to why the beasts were being brought this way; and no more as to why animals brought all the way from Africa to Aquileia, a voyage far

longer than the voyage to Rome, should then be conveyed overland from, Aquileia to the Colosseum.

I enjoyed idling about the teamsters' camps chatting with them and the attendants who cared for the beasts. One hot evening, just about sunset, when I was already thinking of riding off home to bathe and dine, while I was lingering to watch his keepers urging their little gang of slaves to pour more and more water over a gasping hippopotamus, there was a yell of alarm all along the line and a scampering, scattering rush of fleeing men; teamsters, attendants and keepers. A panther had broken out of its cage, when a wagon overset.

He came down the middle of the highway, keeping to it, as everyone ran off it to right and left. I had strolled some distance from where I had tethered my horse. Naturally, as I could not mount and dash off, I did not run. I stepped into the middle of the road and faced the beast. Of course, he stopped, stood still and stared at me. I walked towards him, very deliberately, even pausing between paces, till I was an arm's length from him. He cringed and cowered. I took him by the scruff of his neck, turned him round, led him back to his cage, which was not broken, only jarred open, made him enter it, and closed the door on him.

Thereupon the fugitives flocked back, acclaiming me as a sorcerer. The superintendent of that caravan insisted on my giving him my name. I told him I was Felix, the horse-wrangler of the Imperial estate. He gave me a broad gold piece.

Unable to elicit anything from the natives or the teamsters I resorted to the outlaws. I had been admonished before I saw any of them that it was not according to the etiquette of the district for anyone to ride a horse into the outlaws' camp. If anywhere near it one visited it on foot. If too far one carefully avoided appearing to ride towards it or from it. When the camp, for instance, happened to be south of my cottage I would ride off north, east, or west, fetch a long compass about, tether my horse at least half a mile from the camp, generally farther away, and stroll towards it. On leaving I invariably departed by a path different from that by which I had come. When I reached my horse I was careful similarly to choose a return route which would bring me home some direction other than that towards which I had gone off. Of course, I always observed these precautions, since any neglect of them, if known, would have not only made me unwelcome to the brigands, but also gotten me into disfavor with the whole countryside.

When I reached the outlaws' camp I was careful to let them do most of the talking and to wait for the talk to come round to the subject of the beast-caravans. I had not long to wait, and, when I expressed my amazement and curiosity, they showed no reluctance about informing me. Bulla himself explained that Commodus had become so interested

in beast-fighting, had developed such transcendent skill at fighting beasts and had grown so infatuated with the sport that he spent most of his time in the arena, displaying his dexterity to invited audiences composed of senators, nobles, notabilities and their wives and even children; in which exhibitions he had killed so many creatures that he had not only depleted but had almost exhausted the normal reserves constantly kept at Rome, Ostia and the other Tiber ports. When the procurators in charge of the supplies of beasts for the arena realized that the Emperor was killing his victims faster than they normally were brought in, even lavishly as they had always been provided, they sent out orders urging greatly increased efforts at hunting, capturing, caring for and rapidly transporting all sorts of creatures destined for the Colosseum. The Emperor's killing capacity and love of enjoying and exhibiting his knack so outran their measures that, by the time the increased supply began to come in, the royal sportsman's unerrancy and swiftness outran their best results, so that hasty messages had to be sent to Marseilles, Aquileia, Byzantium, Antioch and Alexandria ordering the instant despatch to Rome, with the utmost speed, regardless of expense, not only of all newly captured beasts as they came in, in contravention of the long-established regulations by which Rome and the provincial capitals shared each variety of animal, but also the concurrent despatch of the local reserves, even the emptying of the beast depositories attached to each amphitheatre. As the voyage from Aquileia to Rome was of variable duration, owing to the uncertainty and shiftiness of the winds, orders had been given to forward all its reserves and supplies, at once, overland. Hence the spectacle which had so excited the countryside and so amazed me. As Commodus was still slaughtering all sorts of beasts daily not only with arrows and spears, to show off his accuracy as a marksman but, even with sword or club, to display his incredible swiftness of movement and unerrancy in directing and timing a blow, he was taxing the capacities of his procurators and their gigantic organization of transports, teams, detention-pens, and hunters merely to stave off the apparently inevitable day when, whatever might run wild in the deserts, forests and mountains, there would be, at Rome, far too few beasts to maintain the autocrat's daily sport.

When I expressed my astonishment at the certainty with which these explanations were uttered and my wonder as to how they came to be so sure, Bulla said:

"Why, our King of the Highwaymen has reliable, capable and secret agents, entirely unsuspected, in every city of Italy. He has a brother and sister in Rome and equally devoted and unfailing helpers in Capua, Aquileia, Milan, Brundisium and Naples. He maintains a road service of swift couriers who bring him promptly all the information collected for him in the cities, where his backers catch every breeze of rumor and are forehanded in getting advance information on all important moves of the authorities as well as in sifting truth from falsehood. Equally prompt are his couriers in disseminating

to subsidiary bands like mine whatever he judges we should learn; thus we know more of goings-on in Rome and at Court than do provincial nobles and highway-police."

As I trudged from the camp to my horse, as I trotted homewards, I was despondent. I had no right to be so, for I was merely one of the innumerable slaves held by the fiscus as the property of Caesar. As such I was notably well off. Even in my proper person I congratulated myself on my amazing luck. I was alive, unsuspected, secure, well-housed, well-clad, well-cared for, freer than many a freeman, than many a nobleman, pleasantly busy at occasional tasks very congenial to me and blest with much leisure among a companionable population in a lovely region full of diversified and charming scenery set off by an exhilarating climate; I should have been gay.

Yet my thoughts were those of a Roman nobleman. I was horrified at the state of the Republic. I knew that Italy had never been entirely free from outlaws. Even under Tiberius highwaymen had perpetrated successful robberies and had captured and held for ransom wealthy persons or even notabilities. But under most of the Emperors these outrages had been few and had occurred only in the wilder districts. During the civil wars between Otho and Vitellius brigandage had become rife all over Italy, even up to the gates of Rome, and Vespasian had had much ado to exterminate the outlaws. Again, under Nerva, bandits had multiplied and prospered. But none had ventured into any populous district during the principates of Trajan, Hadrian and their successors until after the death of Aurelius. Now, because of the negligence of his son, outlaws had so prospered that they had a sort of organization among themselves, like a commonwealth inside the Republic, as I had seen during my captivity with Maternus and now glimpsed again in Bulla's revelations. It argued a horrible disintegration of the governmental mechanism of the Republic and of the Roman character that such things had become possible.

Equally horrifying to me was the contemplation of Caesar's extravagance. I knew that the Republic's income from all sources was insufficient to keep up the court establishment and ceremonials at their normal cost; to defray the expenses of the state festivals with befitting magnificence of games in the circuses, amphitheatres and theatres; to maintain the Praetorian guards, city police, road constabulary and frontier garrisons. I knew that all these branches of the necessary structure of the state were constantly in want of more funds than could be supplied to them. I knew that this want of supplies crippled our commanders along the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine and the Wall, as well as far up the Nile and in the Euxine and made possible the insolence of the Ethiopians and Caledonians as well as the greater insolence of the Parthians, Goths and Germans.

Yet, when conditions so urgently called for greater expenditures along our frontiers and for close economy at home, I beheld our Prince stinting his commanders and their heroic legions and lavishing upon his own pleasure and the gratification of his amazing vanity sums which would have enabled our eagles not only to defy all assailants of our frontiers but to humble and subdue every threatening foe, even to penetrate and subjugate Nubia, Parthia and inner Germany. I sickened at the thought of our shame along the frontiers as at the thought of the energies of thousands upon thousands of hard-muscled, bold-hearted young men wasted on capturing beasts and the like energies of thousands upon thousands of hardy peasants who ought to have been busy at productive labor on farms or in forests or mines, wasted on caring for and transporting swarms of beasts for Commodus to kill.

Those thoughts were depressing. I could not banish them.

The next day the mood persisted. I had nothing to do, did not feel like doing anything in particular and yet felt restless. The weather was perfect. I set off afoot for a place not far from my cottage, not far enough to be called a long walk, where a big gray crag or small cliff like an inland promontory, a spur of a forested mountain, towered up from the southeastern side of the Flaminian Highway. At that point the road was the boundary of the Imperial estate; the crag lay outside it, and, at that part of its foot which projected farthest, was not a hundred yards from the highway. The mountain rose a thousand feet or more from the meadows along the road. The crag was full three hundred feet high. It was perfectly possible to toil up the steep wooded slope of the mountain and walk out on either of two bush-covered shelves which ran round the crag. From the lower of these, where it belted the front of the vertical cliff, there was a fine view down upon the highway and along it both ways; from the upper more of the highway could be seen; from the very top of the crag, which was bare except for two clumps of gnarled trees and starved bushes near its brow, the view included a full two miles of the highway in each direction.

I climbed the slope to the lower shelf and ensconced myself where I was shaded from the sun and had a clear view of the road both ways. From my coign I watched the traffic. I judged that the northern supply of arena-beasts was already overtaxed. The procession of wagons was no longer continuous. They came now in trains of a hundred or so with some miles between the convoys. Just as I settled myself no beast-wagons were in sight, the road-traffic was normal. An Imperial courier dashed into view from the south, tore past at full gallop, and vanished northwards; three family travelling carriages, also bound north, pulling to the side of the road to let him pass; as did a train of a score of mules laden with charcoal.

The first sign of arena-beasts which I saw after I settled myself to watch was a string of eight elephants, each with a turbaned mahout rocking on his back, and seven each with his trunk clasping the tail of the elephant before him. This was the second batch of elephants I had heard of; the former, I had been told, came by way of Ateste, since the elephants could swim the Po and all the other rivers had strong stone bridges. These looked well after their four hundred mile tramp and fit for the hundred and odd ahead of them.

Before they were out of sight there came into view the head of a column of wagons which turned out to be loaded with cages of bears, lynxes, bison, aurochs, elk, wolves and other northern animals. I watched them pass and meditated. After they were gone the road was normal for a full two hours, during which I pondered the thoughts which obsessed me and gloomed with shame over the condition of the Empire. I had brought food and water with me and ate about noon, slept an hour or more and woke to watch the passage of two trains of cages full of lions, tigers, leopards and panthers. The second train was overtaken and passed by two Imperial couriers from the north, racing each other, the former more than a half mile ahead of the latter, and, apparently lengthening his lead. I spent the day on the crag. Also I spent other days there, sometimes on one shelf, sometimes on the other, sometimes on the top.

Not many days elapsed before I again visited the outlaws' camp and had another chat with Bulla; not we two alone, for there was always an easy sociability about the bandits and, if none took part in or broke into their chief's talk, usually two or more lay or sat about listening and sharing our interview.

In the course of our talk Bulla discoursed of his importance, of the importance of the band, of the warm regard in which he and they were held by their head chief, the King of the Highwaymen.

Some quirk inside my head made me venturesome.

"What is his name?" I queried. "You never name him."

"His orders!" Bulla snapped. "I know his name; not another man of our band knows it. He never uses it and takes great pains to keep all outsiders who know his name from suspecting that he is King of the Highwaymen; and similarly to make sure that all outsiders who know him as King of the Highwaymen get no inkling of his name. If the knowledge got abroad the usefulness to him of his brother and sister in Rome would be destroyed."

I apologized for my question.

"No harm done," Bulla smiled. "I don't have to answer any questions unless I want to, and I don't mind questions from you."

"If you don't," I pursued, emboldened, "perhaps you'll be willing to explain how it can be that your king holds you and your band in such high esteem, whereas, to all appearances, you have not acquired a sesterce- worth of loot since long before I reached this neighborhood; in fact, as far as I can hear, have not succeeded in robbing anyone since you located your camp here?"

"I am perfectly willing to explain," laughed Bulla, looking more formidable when he smiled or laughed than when expressionless. "We are no cheap bandits to rob market-women, poor farmers, ordinary travellers or such small fry. We angle for bigger fish. We bide our time. We are here to make three big strokes and then a quick disappearance. Once we have our hands on our chosen prisoners to be held for ransom we shall be off for the mountain heights and the thickest forests; once we have the booty we hope for, those in charge of it will ride fast and far and get clear out of this part of Italy. Is that intelligible?"

"Entirely," said I, and was mute.

Bulla gazed at me almost genially.

"I don't in the least mind telling you," he said, "just what we are waiting for. Half the countryside knows and are alert to help us all they know how.

"In the first place we have word of a big consignment of gold on the way to Rome; ingots from the mines in the mountains of Noricum, nuggets and dust washed from the rivers of Dacia and Pannonia and Moesia. Of course it is in charge of a wary official and has a strong guard, but we have good hopes of getting it. If we do, it will be the biggest haul that any of our bands ever made, and that he has put me here to try for it is proof of my King's esteem for me.

"In the second place a wealthy senator, just the right man to capture and hold for ransom, is coming up from Rome in charge of a big chest of gold coin to be paid out by the administrators of Asia and Macedonia and Achaia. He himself is going out as propraetor of Asia. With him is a wealthy widow, going north to be married at Aquileia, and taking with her a big jewel-chest full of the finest and largest gems in the most magnificent settings. So we have in prospect three prisoners for ransom and three rich treasures.

"The difficulty is that it will be almost impossible to make both captures. If we nab the propraetor and widow, with the coin and gems, the rumor or report of it is almost certain to warn the procurator with the raw gold so that he will elude us. Similarly if we get him, news of our presence will most likely reach and alarm the propraetor and the widow. If one comes ten days or even five before the other we can scarcely hope for complete success. If fewer days intervene we might get both. I am here to get both. The King thinks me capable of the feat. His instructions are that, in case I judge that I can get but one, I am to try for the procurator and his gold, as it is estimated that his gold is worth at least twice the coin and gems together, even adding the possible ransoms of the widow and the propraetor.

"I am hoping they will come only a day apart or even the same day; all our couriers with letters about the progress of the gold convoy and the widow's preparations indicate that they will reach this part of the road at about the same time. They might meet each other right here where, we want them together. I keep nursing that hope.

"Now you know as much as you need to know about our plans."

I thanked him and marvelled at his frankness. But, as I rode home, I reflected that thinking me the Imperial slave I appeared, he thought me certain to be secret and, if possible, helpful.

I spent the next day and the next on my crag, watching the fascinating spectacle afforded by the highway.

On the third day the Villicus chided me for having told my name to the sub-procurator after I had recaged the panther.

"An Imperial courier has just passed," he said. "He is a close friend of a trusty friend of mine in Rome. Like most couriers he is obliging and will carry letters for his friends, even packets. He dropped here a note for me, warning me that I am likely to lose you. My friend is a crony of some of the upper slaves in the Palace and of others in the Beast Barracks.

"Your manumission, which was urged by the aldermen of Nuceria, has been favorably reported and may be ordered. On the other hand, the procurator in charge of the reserves of arena-beasts has heard of you and vows he must have you for service in or for the Colosseum. I am likely to lose you either way. I don't mind your manumission; I'll wager that I can induce you to stay on as you are. But I am all worked up over the prospect of a requisition for you from the Beast Barracks. If one comes it will be your fault."

I told him I was more stirred up about it than he was; that I should hate to leave him and loathed the very idea of being cooped up in Rome amid fetid cages; caring for lions and such like. We thoroughly understood each other, and he said:

"I'll have to manage to report you killed, if the requisition comes. I'm determined to keep you. I'll have to set my wits to work to arrange for it."

I hoped he might, but I felt nervous. I dreaded being dragged to Rome and recalled the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl. I had a feeling that to Rome I was going, my situation was too good to last. I thought of leaving Septima with much regret. Not that I loved her or even cared for her; but she was a girl no man could but respect and admire and wish well to. If I must leave her I resolved to leave her as well off as I could.

Making sure that I was far from any human being and unobserved I opened my amulet-bag, looked over the gems it contained, selected a medium-sized emerald of perfect color, sewed it into the hem of my tunic and sewed up the amulet-bag with the rest of the gems inside it.

At the first opportunity, I revisited the outlaws' camp, with the usual precautions, and found Bulla idle and genial. I told him I needed cash, all the cash I could get, and had an emerald I thought would be worth a noble store of gold and silver coin.

"Show it to me!" he commanded.

I took out my sheath-knife, ripped the emerald out of its hiding-place and passed it to him.

He conned it.

"You are right, brother," he said; "this is a fine gem. I tell you what I'll do. I'll ride, myself, to Sentinum and exchange this for cash, part gold and part silver. Sentinum seems an unlikely place in which to find a cash purchaser for a gem like this, but our King has a friend there who acts as his agent in several respects; among others he keeps cash in hand to exchange any time for precious loot; especially jewelry. He'll hand me the cash without hesitation.

"But if I am to do it for you, you must agree in advance to accept his valuation of the jewel and to divide with me, share and share alike, whatever he pays me for your emerald. In a case like this I charge half the proceeds of the sale as my commission for making the deal and as my fee for my time, risk and trouble. Do you agree?"

"Certainly," I said, "and I am amazed at your offer. How can you be away three days or more at this juncture? Might not your prizes: procurator, propraeor, widow, jewels, coin, and gold all slip through your hands during your absence in my behalf?"

"No fear, lad!" he laughed; "our advices never deceive us. The procurator with his gold is far away and approaching slowly; neither the widow nor the propraeor is ready to leave Rome; both are occupied with endless preparations. I have plenty of time. And it won't take me any three days to reach Sentinum and return. I'll set off at sunset. About the third hour tomorrow I'll be at Sentinum, my mount lathered and blown, but far from used up; about the ninth hour I'll pass out of one of the gates of Sentinum on my return, completely refreshed myself and with my mount fit for the return journey: I'll be here in camp at dawn day after tomorrow, with the coin bags. You can come for your cash any time after the third hour day after tomorrow. Is it a bargain?"

"Done!" said I.

"Then get home," he said. "If I'm to go two nights without sleep I'll give orders now, post my out-pickets and what not and snooze till dusk."

I spent the next day on my crag. Several trains of wagons with arena- beasts passed, but they were farther apart than ten days before. The other traffic on the road was normal.

Next day, not long after the third hour, I was in the outlaws' camp. Bulla I found awake and with no signs of drowsiness or fatigue. In full sight of all of his men he spread a blanket, and, on it placed four coin-bags, two small and two full size. From the larger he spilt their contents on the blanket and, each of us taking a bag, we picked up the silver one piece at a time, both keeping count together. There was an odd piece.

"It's yours, lad!" said Bulla. "I've enough here."

The gold pieces similarly spilled and counted, came out even.

"Are you satisfied?" Bulla queried.

"Both with the amount and the division," I replied, "and now I'll be off. You must need sleep."

"Sit still!" Bulla commanded.

He rose and went into his tent, for the outlaws had excellent hide tents. He returned with a fine new coin-belt of pigskin leather.

"Here," he said as he squatted down and handed it to me, "is a little gift from Bulla. Wear it next your skin. And remember to keep it flat and loose. Many a man has lost his life with his coin in a tight place because a bulging belt betrayed him to greedy ruffians. My lads will respect you, but you may encounter bandits who have no inkling that you are under my protection. Don't attempt to carry too much, of your coin about your waist."

I thanked him and tramped off.

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CHAPTER XXVII THE POINT OF VIEW

That evening, after our dinner, a perfect dinner eaten under a grape- arbor, lingering over the fruit and honey in the mingled light of waning dusk and a clear crescent moon, I showed Septima my belt and bags, put in the belt what silver would fill it to a flaccid and comfortable flatness, and gave her all the gold and the rest of the silver. I had already explained to her what impended over us, and had emphasized my wish to remain with her and my anxiety to know that she was provided for, if we were to be separated.

I did not visit the post of the road-constabulary as often as the camp of the outlaws. Next day I rode over to their post and chatted with one of the sergeants and several of the men. They were in doubt between, two opinions: most held that their presence in the district had frightened the bandits away and that they had left the neighborhood and transferred their attention to a wholly different region; only a few maintained the view that the brigands had been lurking near from before their arrival and that all their efforts had failed to locate their hiding place. I heard nothing which led me to believe that they had any inkling of the location of the outlaws' camp, of their purposes, or of their intended coup.

After a day of happy idling on my crag I visited Bulla. He was gay.

"It promises well," he volunteered. "The procurator and his gold are well on this side of Ariminum and the propraetor and widow left Rome yesterday. They'll be here within two days of each other, if he holds the rate he has kept all the way from Bononia and they travel as such luxurious folks generally do. Come over as often as you like. No one will suspect you or follow you. I'll keep you posted as to what our advices promise us. You may be able to help us."

By this time I was so interested in Bulla and his plans that I oscillated between my crag, the outlaws' camp and the constabulary post, with no more other occupations than what I judged absolutely needful to forestall any unwelcome interest in my doings and the possibility of too many persons knowing of my visits to the outlaws.

When next I visited them Bulla told me that something had alarmed the procurator. Either some rumor of their presence along the road had reached him or he knew of the bad reputation of the stretch of the Flaminian Highway through the Umbrian mountains

between Forum Sempronii and Nuceria, which it had acquired some years before when the King of the Highwaymen himself had made on it a succession of valuable captures which had yielded him princely booty and the reports of which had spread all over Italy. Anyhow their advices informed them that he had packed his bullion-chests with stones and old-iron and had parcelled out his packets of dust and nuggets among the wagons of a long train of arena-beasts.

"We'll fool him!" Bulla boasted. "We'll nab him and hold him for a big ransom. Also we'll not only make sure of his bullion chests in case our information is false, or based on an intentional rumor he has given out as a blind; but we'll get that bullion, too, if it is not in the chests, but hidden in the wagons in the guise of dusty packets of provender for the draft-cattle or of meat for the caged beasts. We'll get it!"

From his mention of the wagons we fell into talk of the increasing difficulty of getting fresh meat for the lions and other beasts, of the depletion of the flocks and herds along the roads from Aquileia, to Rome; and he told me that his advices reported that the whole country near the highways was already swept clean of all goats, sheep and cattle, except breeding stock, milch stock and their choicest young kept for breeding. The inhabitants could get no beef, mutton or goats' flesh for themselves; all had gone into the maws of hyenas, tigers, wolves and the rest; and the procurators were insisting on the farmers selling their kids, lambs, calves, ewes and cows-in-milk, any stock, even mules and horses; any animals fit to butcher for lion-food.

From this we came round to chatting of my talks with the teamsters and of my prospect from my crag. I had told Bulla of the crag long before, but he did not seem to have taken in the idea. Now he was delighted.

"If I'd paid attention to you soon enough," he said, "I'd have put in a day or two with you watching the show. It's too late now. Our prayed for chances are coming soon, and not far apart."

Next day he was gleeful.

"It's all going to work out like the end of a theater-play," he said. "The procurator and the propraetor and his charge are practically certain to come along tomorrow afternoon. I calculate that they will meet not far south of your crag. I've planned to post one ambush near the foot of your crag, just south of it, another at a judicious interval down the road nearer Rome. I'll have 'em between the two ambushes about the middle of the afternoon or between that and sunset. We'll nab all three ransom prizes at once and we'll lay our hands on the jewels, coin and gold almost at the same instant. I've arranged to lead the constables off on a false scent about noon and they'll be miles away up a

lonely crossroad when we pull off our coup. We'll make our getaway, with the swag, hours before they can get wind of the occurrence and follow on our trail. We'll have a long start of them.

"You can watch the whole thing from your crag. This ideal weather is going to last many days yet. And the moon will be full two nights from now, so its light will help us two nights on our getaway. I envy you up on that crag watching the show, comfortable as a senator at a theater, aloft like Jupiter on Olympus in the Iliad."

Next day I made sure that the Villicus would not want me, had Septima put up for me an abundant supply of her inviting food and set off about the middle of the morning for my crag, on foot, of course. I climbed to the very top and ensconced myself under and among sheltering bushes so that I was certain that I could not be seen from the road in either direction, yet could view it both ways as far as the horizon, except just at the foot of the crag and where, in the distance, hilltops hid the hollows behind them. Close by me I placed my precious kidskin of much watered wine, I might say of water flavored with wine, so that it would keep cool in the thickest shade. The day was hot, clear and still and the rays of the sun fierce. The occasional slight breezes were very welcome.

The outlook was really magnificent; a broad prospect of rolling pasturage, hilly pasturage, and wooded mountains; the grass-lands and grassy hillsides diversified by scattered trees, clumps of trees and small groves; the lower levels of woodland broken by grassy glades; the brighter green of the forests of chestnut, beech, and oak merging imperceptibly into the darker green of the pine-forests; the score of farms in sight brilliant in the green landscapes like semi-jewels; all the wide prospect glowing under a deep blue sky, varied by a very few very white clouds, the intense sunlight beating down on everything. It was a perfect summer day.

I coned the road, on which I saw only the rear of a column of wagons conveying arena-beasts receding over the hilltops to southwards, and the normal traffic, horsemen or two-horse carriages or wagons far apart and few. I dozed.

I must have slept a full hour. I waked hot, but much refreshed, feeling lively and full of interest in what was to come. Just after I waked I saw the constabulary, the officers and about a third of the men on horseback, the rest afoot, come up the road from the direction of their post, which was south of the crag. The infantrymen, tramped their fastest and the mounted men kept pace with them. They were evidently off on their wild- goose chase. As they came into sight below me, after passing my perch, I watched them double-quick northwards and wheel to their right into the first crossroad. They were barely out of sight among the forested hills when I saw momentarily, on the Highway, fully four miles to northward, on a sunlit hilltop, what I took to be the first

wagon of a train of teams drawing cages of arena-beasts. I watched the road in that direction. What I saw confirmed my conjecture. Soon the road to northward was filled from its farthest visible hilltop to just below my crag with wagon-teams such as I had many times watched transporting cages of lions, tigers, leopards, panthers and the like. I made out also some cages which I was certain contained hyenas.

Every little while I glanced the other way. Just as the first wagons of the long train vanished from my sight into that section of the road immediately below me where my crag hid it from my view, I saw appear on a hilltop to southwards what I made sure was the travelling carriage of a wealthy noble. I conjectured that it had inside of it the ransomable *propraetor*. I kept my eyes on the road in that direction, only glancing northward from time to time. One such glance caught a glimpse of a travelling carriage among the beast-wagons; probably the *procurator* in charge of the bullion.

After I had caught glimpses of it on several successive hilltops the *propraetor's* carriage was near enough, on one of them, for me to recognize it. Of course, I had known from childhood the travelling carriages of our senate and nobility. As everybody knows, each, has a certain unmistakable individuality. Our makers of travelling carriages never make two precisely alike, and, what is more, the tastes of different families are so different that patterns are very unlike. I recognized the carriage for that of *Faltonius Bambilio*.

Why he was going out as *propraetor* of Asia so long after his term as *praetor* was a puzzle to me. I accepted it as one of the countless eccentricities of Imperial administration under *Commodus*. The irregularities of the management of the provinces ruled in the name of Caesar by prefects and *procurators* had notoriously extended to the provinces ruled by *proconsuls* and *propraetors* in the name of the senate. I had always disliked, despised and even hated *Bambilio* for his pomposity, self-esteem and bad manners. I rejoiced at the opportunity to look on at his capture.

It was by this time past the middle of the afternoon, the day still surpassingly fair and lovely, with few clouds in the sky, a steady light breeze, the mellow afternoon sunlight bathing the world and the sun already visibly declining towards the western horizon.

While I was grinning at my thoughts and watching the advance of *Bambilio's* carriage, glancing back at intervals at the beast-train and the *procurator's* coach, I caught sight, on the highway behind *Bambilio's* carriage, of another travelling carriage of which I had descried no glimpse before, though I must have missed seeing it as it topped several hills further south. When I caught sight of it, it was near enough for me to recognize it at first view.

Vedia's travelling coach!

Between the first and second beat of my thumping heart, I went through an amazing variety of complex, shifting and lucid thinking. And my thinking, multifold and effective as it was, was but as a chip on the surface of a freshet in a mountain gorge amid the torrent of emotions which inundated me.

Since I had begun to mend as the result of the succour and medication of old Chryseros Philargyrus I had resolutely refrained from, thinking of Vedia. I had argued with myself that it was impossible for me to forget or ignore the daily and hourly contrasts between my former status as a wealthy nobleman and my present condition as a fugitive always in danger and generally in acute discomfort. Amid the inevitable resultant depression I might keep alive, healthy and sane if I concentrated my thoughts on self-congratulation at my survival. If I dwelt on my downfall I should lose my wits. If, in addition to thoughts of my loss of rank, wealth, friends and ease I yielded to my inclination to brood over my loss of Vedia, I should infallibly go insane. I resolutely put thoughts of her away. I succeeded in keeping them away. During my winter at the hut in the mountains, during my succeeding adventures, I had not thought of Vedia; thoughts of her had crossed my mind but seldom and fleetingly.

Now, all at once, I was overwhelmed by the realization of how ardently, how unalterably I loved her, how keenly I longed for her, how tenderly I felt towards her. Nothing, past, present or future, mattered to me except Vedia and her welfare. I had been thinking with relished amusement of the dismay of some pampered beauty haled from, her luxurious coach and off through the wild mountains, immured in some lonely cave in the forests, guarded by coarse ruffians, reduced to the most primitive diet and bedding, forced to endure all sorts of discomforts, and threatened with death or worse if an enormous ransom were not forthcoming promptly. I had been chuckling at the prospect of getting a far-off glimpse of the first act of this comedy.

My revulsion of feeling was dizzying. I was hot and cold with horror at the thought of Vedia's agony, terror and misery and of her danger among Bulla's swarthy, brutal ruffians with their black curly hair and beards intensifying the villainy of their lowering faces, with their mighty hands always close to their daggers. Vedia I must save!

How?

Almost as I recognized her carriage, my eyes, instinctively sweeping my entire outlook, caught sight of Selinus feeding among a small herd of young mares on a hillside midway of the extensive pasture on the other side of the road just to north of my crag. I knew there was, a little to the north of the crag, on the same side of the road, a knoll from

which that bit of hillside was plainly visible at no great distance. I had my plan worked out in all its details.

I drank all I could hold of my watered wine, left my cloak by the kidskin, tucked a small packet of food into my belt-wallet, and raced down, the steep slope of the mountainside to the north of the crag, leaping from rock to rock under the huge forest trees. I reached the gentler slopes near the highway and gained the top of the knoll. Selinus was in plain view, grazing among his brides, and by good luck, all were headed towards me. I stood on the summit of the knoll and waved my arms. Selinus caught sight of me and galloped joyously down the slope of the pasture towards me. When he was near I ran towards him down the slope of the knoll, being careful that he should not lose sight of me. My luck held and he and I approached the highway and each, other where there was a comfortable interval between the lion's cage on the wagon which had been passing when I topped the knoll and the leading yoke of the team tugging the wagon next behind. The wind, also, was towards me, so that Selinus did not smell the lions till he and I met in the highway and I had mounted him. Like a hunting dog bounding over a fallen tree Selinus had leapt the tall thorn hedge which bordered the highway to keep stock off it and in the meadow.

Once I was on his back we set off northward at full gallop, which almost at once quickened into a maddened run. He had shied violently as we passed the first cage and he winded the lion in it, but I stuck on him. Also I stuck on at each, less violent sideways lurch as we passed cage after cage: tiger, panther, leopard, hyenas or lion; all smelt equally terrifying to him, but he only ran faster and his terror went into speed ahead rather than into leaps aside.

When we reached the crossroad, up which the constabulary had turned, the procurator's carriage was still somewhere up the highway; I had not seen it since I left the top of the crag. The train of beast-wagons seemed endless.

Into the crossroad we turned and up it Selinus tore. I chuckled. No road- police, no matter how young, nimble and long-winded, could maintain a double-quick any distance on that up-slope. Selinus mounted the hills like a grayhound after a hare. We were sure to overtake the detachment soon. They could not have gone far.

Overtake them we did and the maddened run at which Selinus scaled those steep hills caught their officer's attention. I had rehearsed what I meant to say and wasted no words. What I said conveyed the whole situation to him.

"We are too few horsemen to overcome them," he said, "but we can scare them from their booty and maybe from their captives. We'll ride our fastest and we have time to

reach them before they are thinking of flight. The complete surprise will save the jewels, coin and gold and most likely the lady and the officials.

"But you fellows must double-quick after us to support us in case they recover from their amazement, rally and round on us from some near vantage-ground. You can retrace your steps in a tenth of the time it took us to reach here. Race!

"And you, Felix, give me that racer of yours. Fall in with the men. Here Caius, give Felix your saddle and bridle. Your mare is giving out. Felix, saddle and bridle your horse for me. Caius, take my horse."

In a moment I was afoot among the infantry constables, the officer was in the saddle on Selinus, the reins in his hands, and the horsemen were off at a tearing gallop, with us footmen after them at a run which carried us almost by leaps down the steep slope.

When we reached the highway neither the mounted police nor any outlaws were anywhere in sight. But it was plain that more time than I had realized had elapsed since I vaulted on Selinus. Not only was the sun near the horizon, but the bandits had evidently been further up the road than this. For an instant I marvelled that they had come this far at all when both their ambushes were south of the crag. Then I realized that they had been searching the wagons for the bullion. Every wagon was stalled, half were overset, the tongue-yoke of each was hamstrung, every cage was empty, not a lion, tiger or leopard, panther or hyena to be seen; all, apparently, let out that their cages might be ransacked. I conjectured that letting them out had taken less time than it would have taken to kill them.

Panting, sweating, nearing exhaustion, we hastened along the highway at a jolting run not much faster than the quick walk of untired men, but our best speed. We passed scores of stalled wagons, every cage empty, two hamstrung oxen or mules or even horses lying in agony before each wagon, the rest of the cattle either loosed and gone or held fast by the stalled wagons behind them. We saw not one teamster, not one beast. The long series of stalled wagons, with their hamstrung or stalled cattle and empty cages extended to the foot of the crag and beyond it. Beyond it we came on the procurator's carriage, empty; no horse to it or by it. Still we had seen no human being.

A half-mile further, midway of a flat stretch of road, on one side of which was an expanse of swampy ground, varied with pools bordered by sedge, reeds and bushes, with areas of tussocks and with clumps of willows and alders, we came on Bambilio's and Vedia's carriages, their gilded decorative carvings, coral-red panel-bars, pearl-shell panel-panes, gilded rosette-bosses, silver-plated hubs and gilded spokes and fellies glittering in the late sunshine.

His coach was without any sign of a horse near it, hers with all four hamstrung; their white leather harness, with its gold and silver bosses, horridly stained with the blood they had spattered all over them as they lay struggling and trying to kick. Both carriages were empty, their cushions and mattresses and other contents scattered about on the roadway.

The sun was near setting. Our sergeants, blown as their men and as I, paused and mopped their faces. We scanned the outlook. Far away well up the mountain side we caught sight of a group of burly men, and among them a slender figure clad in a garb of pale lavender hue with the sheen of silk. Below and close a similar group among which were two figures conspicuous for crimson cloaks or the like. Far below and much nearer us we glimpsed the pursuing horsemen.

Off we set, and our fresh excitement seemed to put fresh vigor into all of us. We ran a full mile straight across pastures and wooded hills towards the point where I had glimpsed Vedia.

The sun set.

The constables ran on, panting, but by no means failing.

I gave out.

The hopelessness of such pursuit took all the heart out of me.

I stopped.

I could not hope to keep up with the excited police. I could not believe that they would give any effective support to their mounted comrades or even that they could overtake the outlaws after sunset in such broken and wooded country, or that any or all of them could rescue any of the prisoners I shuddered to think of Vedia in the clutches of such ruthless villains. But I could accomplish nothing towards helping her. I turned to slink homewards.

Half way to the spot where we had left the highway I encountered a lion. He did not attack me or menace me and I was not afraid of him. But the sight of him brought to my attention that the light was waning and that I was, for a man afoot, a considerable distance from my cottage in broken country full of escaped beasts of prey. I had never understood my power over all animals, but I had always conceived that it depended on the way I looked to them when they gazed at me. I was totally unafraid of the most

ferocious beast by daylight, but by no means comfortable in twilight or dusk, while after dark I had no reason to think that a lion, or tiger would prove more tractable to me than to any other man. I felt that I must hasten home, if I was ever to reach it alive. With what breath I had left I ran the rest of the easy downhill path to the highway.

When I reached it twilight had not yet deepened into dusk and I could see fairly well. The four hamstrung horses were struggling pitifully to rise and screaming at intervals. With my sheathknife I put them out of their misery; as also the four pack-mules which lay, similarly hamstrung, in the roadway, behind the carriage.

In spite of my dread of carnivora after dark I examined the coach and what lay about it on the road. There were two kidskins, bulging roundly, presumably with wine. Three covered food hampers, unopened; and, intact, a beautiful little inlaid chest, such as ladies have for their combs, brushes, ointment-pots and similar toilet articles. From their condition I conjectured that the bandits had just commenced to rummage the coach when the unexpected approach of the mounted constables, whose small numbers they most likely did not realize, had scared them away.

Reluctant to be off and fearing to remain, I glanced about, irresolute. In a clump of willows and alders in the midst of the swampy tract I caught sight of a bit of color out of keeping with anything which naturally belonged there and suggesting a woman's garment. There was a dryshod way to that clump of trees and bushes. I threaded it towards what I had glimpsed. When I was hardly more than half way from the road to the clump I thought I heard a sob. I made haste.

Hearing the place I saw a young and slender and graceful woman dressed as a slave girl. Somehow the sight of her brought to my mind's-eye vivid recollections of my convalescent outings in Nemestronia's water-garden. She looked terrified and yet hesitating to flee from me, as if she feared the swamp. A step nearer I realized that Vedia's maid, a woman not unlike her in build, as faithful to her as Agathemer was to me and amazingly astute, had had the shrewdness and also the time to fool the brigands by exchanging clothes with her mistress in the carriage.

"Vedia!" I exclaimed. "Caia!"

"Castor!" she screamed. "You know me? You call me Caia? Are you a ghost? Are you alive? And that voice! Oh, are you real?"

"Real and alive," I answered. "I am myself. I am Hedulio."

To my amazement there, in the dusk under the willows, among the alders, she gave a half-smothered shriek and the next instant her arms were round my neck and mine round her, and she was sobbing on my shoulder, repeating:

"Call me Caia again. This is too good to be true."

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CHAPTER XXVIII MOONLIGHT

When our transports had abated a little I was aware that the twilight was deepening into dusk and that I must somehow save Vedia from the roaming wild beasts. I guided her along the twisting track from her hiding-place to the road. As we gained it I heard a loud snarl of a lion or tiger or panther far off towards the crag. We must make haste.

I reflected that it would be a very strong and enterprising beast, even if a lion, which would break into Vedia's coach when its panels were slid and fastened.

"We are too far from any habitation," I said, "for us to reach any while the light holds. I dare not make the attempt with you among all these freed wild beasts. I should be afraid to try it alone in this deepening dusk. The best thing we can do is to get inside your carriage, slide the panels and trust to them to keep out any inquisitive leopard or lion. With the carcasses of four well-fed horses and as many mules laid ready to eat, no tiger ought to be hungry enough to be eager after us."

"I had thought that, too," she agreed.

I peered through the open door into the coach, which was roomy. Then I replaced in it its mattresses and cushions, Vedia showing me how they fitted and, going round to the other door and opening it, helping me to lay smooth the unmanageable feather-stuffed upper-cushions. She also showed me the receptacles for her toilet-box, the food hampers and the kidskins. While we were thus busied the almost full moon rose clear and bright over a distant mountain. I helped Vedia into the coach and she disposed herself at full length on its cushions, sinking into the feathers. I walked round the coach and slid all the panels except the front panel through which the moonlight entered, then I climbed inside, shut and fastened the door, shut the panels, fastened each and stretched out by Vedia, like her with plenty of cushions and pillows under my head and shoulders.

As I fastened the last panels we heard the hunting-squall of a leopard at no great distance. Vedia clung to me, shuddering.

"You have saved me, Caius," she said. "As you did on the terrace at Nemestronia's."

Naturally, for a while, we exchanged kisses and caresses without any intermingled words.

When, she spoke she said:

"How do you come to be alive?"

"That," I said, "is thanks to Agathemer and is a long tale. I am faint with hunger and thirst, you yourself should be in need of nourishment and might be the better for it. There should be food in those hampers and wine in the kidskins."

"There is," she said, "and plenty. I am as hungry and thirsty as you, now I am no longer terrified and am recovering from my panic. But I am intensely eager to hear your story. Do begin at the beginning just as soon as you can, and tell it while we eat."

Then she showed me how to dispose the hampers as they were designed to be arranged while the occupants of the coach ate. They were very generously filled with the most luxurious fare: hard-boiled eggs, ham, cold roast pork, sliced thin; breast of roast goose, breast of roast duck, young guinea-fowls, broiled whole and cut up, broiled chickens, broiled squabs; half a dozen kinds of bread, a quarter loaf and different sorts of rolls; lettuce and radishes; bottles of oil, vinegar, garum sauce, and other sauces; salt smoked fish; figs, both big green figs and small purple figs; a jar of strained honey, several kinds of cakes, and plenty of salt, pepper, other relishes, and a lavish provision of knives and of silver, plates, spoons, cups and other utensils.

"Why all this profusion?" I queried. "You have enough here for a party of ten."

"I always have a variety like this," she explained. "I generally have very little appetite on a journey so I tell Lydia to put in all the things she can get which she knows I like. Then something is likely to tempt me."

We feasted by moonlight, while I told my story from the moment when I had received her warning letter.

"I knew that you mounted the horse in front of Plosurnia's Tavern," she said, "but I have never heard of you after that. Tanno and I did all we could to find out what had become of you; all we could without risking the secret service getting an inkling that we had a hope that you were not dead.

"In fact it was not only advertised from the Palace in due course, but circumstantially reported to us privately, that the secret service had learned that you had arranged for a

fishing-vessel to take you to sea from Sipontum. They had then set three detachments of Praetorians to intercept you, one on each road, with watchers to warn them if you were recognized. You were seen or betrayed somewhere between Hadria and Auximum, one account said at Ortona, and the Praetorians killed you.

"Tanno said that the secret service always gave out such an account if they failed to locate and capture any man they should have arrested. But the confirmation of the story by three different private agencies plainly destroyed his hopes that you might still be alive. I tried to keep on hoping, but, after a whole year, I stopped lying awake and sobbing in the dark; while I felt more grief for you than I ever felt for Satronius Patavinus and more truly widowed than when he died, I ceased to grieve and regained my interest in gaieties and suitors. Don't you think that was natural?"

"Very natural," I admitted and went on with my story.

The moon rose higher and its rays no longer struck on our faces, but, striking through the open panel, diffused from what part of the cushion or sides of the coach they fell on directly, lit up the whole interior with a pearly glimmer. By this subdued light Vedia looked bewitchingly charming and coquettish, all the more because of the contrast between her elaborate coiffure and the simple costume her maid had worn.

I ate liberally and with relish and she appeared to enjoy her food as I did.

"You don't seem a bit worried," I remarked, "over the loss of your jewels."

"Loss!" she exclaimed. "I haven't lost them, they are all in the secret compartment under us inside the coach body, just where Lydia put them before we left Rome. The bandits had barely begun to ransack the coach when we heard the yells of the constabulary and then the hoof-beats of their horses. They and their horses made so much noise that the brigands thought they had to do with a hundred or more and fled, dragging off Bambilio and Lydia and leaving me and the hampers, even the wine-skins. They never were near laying hands on those jewels. They had Bambilio's coin-chests, to be sure; but not my jewelry nor so much as a nugget of the bullion they had expected. They were preparing to torture the procurator to make him reveal the hiding place of his bullion, when the yelling and galloping horsemen scared them away."

I congratulated her and we ate with even more relish. Both of us, however, were sparing of the wine, though I gloated at the savor of the first really good wine I had tasted for more than two years.

And garum sauce! I had not realized how I had craved such luxuries as garum.

I told my story to an accompaniment of Vedia's exclamations. She was amazed at all of it; at our crawl through the drain, at the loyalty of old Chryseros, at my involvement with Maternus, at my encounter with Pescennius Niger, at my involvement with the mutineers; but most of all, at my having been present in the great circus, an eyewitness of the most spectacular day of racing Commodus ever exhibited under his transparent pseudonym of Palus and his last day of public jockeying; and, equally, at Agathemer's device by which we survived the massacre.

We had finished our leisurely meal and I had finished my story, neither our appetites nor the flow of my narrative marred by the distant squalls of leopards and roars of lions, nor by the uncanny sounds made by the hyenas, when, all of a sudden, a lion uttered a powerful and prolonged roar within a dozen yards of us. Vedia shrieked and clung to me, clutching me so I had to remonstrate with her in order to be able to slide shut and fasten the open front panel. I had barely fastened it when another roar as loud, sudden, and long answered the first from the other side of us, somewhere in the swamp tract. This time Vedia did not shriek, she only clung closer to me. I held her as close as she held me and, so clinging to each other, in the pale glimmer of the moonlight striking on the shell panes in the panels, we listened to repetitions of the roars, each time nearer, till the two beasts were roaring at each other not much more than its length from the carriage, apparently facing each other across the dead pole-horses. I expected a fight, but they ceased roaring, and, by the sounds they made, fell to gorging themselves on horse-meat.

When we had become used to their proximity, since, after a lapse of time which seemed like half an hour or more, they kept on crunching and rending without any roarings and without coming nearer the carriage, Vedia, her arms still about me, told me the story of her doings since my downfall. Most of it was taken up with social gaieties and with rejections of tolerated suitors.

Then she, shyly, told me of her liking for Orensus Pacullus, of Aquileia, and her promise to marry him. She explained at length why she had been called imperatively to Aquileia, why he felt bound to remain there and how it was that she had agreed to travel to Aquileia to be married there, instead of his returning to Rome, which would have been the most conventional arrangement.

While she was telling me this we heard not only the noise of the feeding of the two lions which were eating the dead horses, but heard also a third animal as noisily tearing at one of the dead mules behind the coach.

"I cannot believe," she said, "that I ever consented to marry anybody else, even when I was certain you were dead. But you know, Caius, it is natural to be married; and to live alone, as maid or widow, is not only lonesome and unnatural, but unfashionable and absurd.

"But, now that I know you are alive, I shall not care who thinks me ridiculous or who calls me silly; I shall feel lonely, but lonely merely because I cannot live with you. I shall jilt poor dear Pacullus, who is as good a man and as good a fellow as ever lived, and I shall stick to my widowhood until I die or Commodus joins the company of the gods and we can arrange for your full rehabilitation and the restoration of your estates and rank."

Just as she said this we distinctly heard clawing and snuffing against the panels behind our heads, opposite where the lions were feasting. Vedia did not shriek, she was too scared to make any sound: she merely clutched me closer.

Both lions roared in front of the coach; a tiger's rasping yarr answered from behind it and almost instantly there were noises alongside the coach indicating that a lion and tiger were at grips; growls, snarls, more growls and more snarls, each choked off in the middle as it were, half swallowed and left unfinished. For some reason the noise of the fight immediately started a chorus of hyenas, emitting their strange cries, much like human laughter, but the laughter of maniacs. Our situation and environment was to the last degree uncanny.

The fight lasted no long time. We could not conjecture which combatant was victorious, but they dashed off, one pursuing the other. The remaining lion roared twice; long, choking, snarling torrents of thunderous noise; then it also went away. Except for distant snarls, squalls and roars, we were in a silent moonlit world, almost peaceful. I ventured to unfasten the other front panel and slide it a little way open. The rays of the high moon, poured in on our feet, we looked out on a magical prospect.

Vedia put a relishing warm arm round my neck.

"Call me Caia again," she whispered. "Where you are Caius I am Caia!"

[Footnote: From the Roman marriage-ritual.] The implication thrilled me.

It was as if we were married, had been man and wife for long past.

It may have been midnight, was near midnight when she said:

"I don't want to go to sleep at all. We can do without one night's sleep. We can sleep tomorrow night, when we are not together. Let's try to keep awake every minute till daylight."

In fact it was not easy to sleep, for a pack of hyenas, apparently as friendly with each other as if they had hunted together since they were weaned, came and picked the bones of the horses and mules, even ate the bones, which cracked loudly between their powerful jaws. The noise of their gluttony would have kept awake a pair sleepier than we.

But, when the moon was almost half way down the sky, when the roars and squalls and snarls of lions and leopards and tigers and the horrid laughter of hyenas had ceased to sound, when the night silence was so complete that we could hear the cocks crowing near distant farmsteads and the faint breezes rustling in the willows, we did sleep, she first, her arms round me and her head on my shoulder.

When we woke, with the slanted moon rays on the back corner of the coach behind me, she cuddled to me luxuriously, patted me and presently whispered, in a bantering, roguish tone which I detected even in her softest whisper:

"You remember that old sweetheart of yours?"

"I don't remember any sweetheart except you," I retorted. "I never had any sweetheart except you."

"I mean," she said, "that minx who made eyes at you and all your country neighbors and certainly tried to marry you and most of your Sabine friends."

"You mean Marcia?" said I.

"Ah," she said, playfully and teasingly, "I thought you would remember her name. If you remember her name you must remember her."

"Of course I remember Marcia," I said. "How could I forget her after the way she led my uncle by the nose, had half the countryside mad for her, set us all by the ears, rebuffed Ducconius Furfur, and married Marcus Martius?"

"If I had never known her before I'd be bound to recall the creature who embroiled me with you. My! You were in a wax!"

"I certainly was," she whispered, "and I thought I had reason to be indignant. But now I believe your version of her relations with you and feel no qualms at recollecting the slanders I then credited. But, the point is, you remember her."

"My dear," I said, "if I had never set eyes on Marcia except when I encountered her in the Baths of Titus the day you rescued me from drowning when I fainted in the swimming pool, I'd remember her for life. She is too beautiful to forget."

"Am I so hideous?" she demanded.

"You are the loveliest woman alive," I vowed. "But Marcia is amazingly spectacular and the pictures she makes impress themselves on one's memory and eyesight. I could never forget her in that brilliant tableau on the camp-platform facing the mutineers, even if I had never seen her before."

"I was coming to that," Vedia said. "Marcia, who was a foundling and a slave as the adopted child of a slave, has risen so high that she is truly Empress in all but the official title. She has all the honors Faustina or Crispina ever had, except that she keeps out of those religious rites, participation in which is confined to women married with the full old-time ceremonies and observances."

I then told her what Agathemer and I had heard about Marcia while domiciled with Colgius, and of the absence from all talk about her of any mention of or allusion to Marcus Martius; I asked if she knew what had become of him or, indeed, anything about him.

"Oh, yes," she said, "all Roman society knew the main facts and dear old Tanno supplied me with many of the intimate details. Commodus made a point of having Martius specially presented to him because he had heard that he had been, with you and Tanno, one of the foremost fighters in your affrays in Vediumnum and near Villa Satronia. At his private audience he congratulated and bepraised Martius and acclaimed his prowess. Martius, who seems to have been a very fine fellow, disclaimed any pretensions to such laudations and modestly stated that he had, at the beginning of each fight, been far in the rear in your travelling-coach, with Marcia; that she had clung to him and so delayed his getting out; that each time he had gotten out and picked up the staff of a disabled combatant, but that, in each combat, he had arrived barely in time to land a few blows on some of the routed enemy; that in neither affray had he done any real fighting or been in any danger or performed any exploits.

"Commodus, in his blunt way, had asked whether he was good for anything, anyhow. Martius had replied that he was considered more than a mediocre horse-master.

"Commodus had then invited him to demonstrate his prowess in the Stadium of the Palace. There Martius had shown such skill, courage, agility, judgment, grace and ease

that Commodus was delighted. He had Martius ride a number of wild, fierce and unmanageable horses and was more and more charmed with him.

"Next day he had another batch of intractable mounts for him. As Martius was manoeuvring one which he had almost subdued Commodus stepped too near the plunging brute and, in saving the Emperor from being run down and trampled, Martius was somehow thrown and his neck broken.

"Commodus was very penitent, felt that he had caused Martius' death, had him given a funeral of Imperial magnificence and, as soon as her grief had quieted enough, paid Marcia a ceremonial visit of condolence, as if she had been the widow of a full general killed in battle on the frontier.

"One sight of Marcia was enough. Within a very short space of time her wiles had ensnared him and Crispina raged in vain."

Then she told me all the story of the intrigues by which Marcia poisoned the Emperor's mind against the Empress, until Crispina fell under all sorts of suspicion in the eyes of Commodus: of how at the same time Marcia subtly laid snares for Crispina and enticed her into injudicious behavior with several gallants, until finally the Emperor put her under surveillance, later relegated her to Capri, then to some more distant island, and finally had her brought back to Rome, publicly tried, convicted and executed.

I told her my conjectures as to the queer outcome of the arrest of Ducconius Furfur and as to who Palus really was and who occupied the throne while Palus exhibited himself as wrestler, boxer, charioteer and what not.

"I know nothing to confirm your surmises," she said, "but we about the Court have often been puzzled at the way Commodus appeared to be in two places at once. You set me thinking."

After the second cockcrow, since dawn was not now far away, we fell to talking of the future.

"I shan't marry anybody, ever, except you, dear!" she promised, without my asking it and again and again: "I'll remain a widow until I die unless we outlive Commodus, and Tanno and I succeed in having you rehabilitated. I have many consolations in my wealth and social position and friends."

"And suitors," I put in, mimicking her tone when she bantered me about Marcia.

"And suitors!" she replied. "Caius, I love you, and I'll never marry anyone else, but I do love attention. I love to keep a dozen good catches dangling about me; their wooings and their gifts and their behavior generally are no end of good fun. And it's good fun to have half the marriageable belles furious with me. I cannot help encouraging any man, or even lad, who moons about after me. But you have never had any reason to be jealous, you have none now, you never will have."

I expressed my faith in her the best I could.

"You are a dear, dear boy," she said, "and it is good of you not to be jealous, even when you have so little reason to be jealous. I have much more. Suppose I raged about Nebris or Septima?"

I tried to change the subject and succeeded, when I suggested that we must plan what we were to do at dawn and in the future. After a full discussion and the airing of her ideas and mine, we agreed that there was little or no likelihood of the road-constables returning or of anyone else approaching her carriage before full daylight. As soon as there was sufficient light for it to be safe, I would open the panels enough for us to keep watch up and down the highway and in the direction the constables had taken. When we saw them returning I was to wait till they were near enough to assure her safety and then, at the last moment, I was to slip out on the other side of the coach. That was next the swamp and I could be out of sight among the willows and alders when less than two score yards from the road; also I knew the path across the swamp and could cross it and go off home through the meadows and pastures beyond it. This was our plan.

She said she would, whenever the road-constables returned, behave as if she had been alone in the coach all night. She had no doubt that the police would give her every assistance in their power.

"Of course," she said, "my intendant galloped off somewhere, somehow and the coachman and outrider and mule-drivers ran away; you couldn't expect any or all of them to make a stand against all those armed brigands. If the constables return, as they will, all my men will come back. Osdarus will manage to get me horses from the nearest change-station or somewhere else, somehow. Once at an inn I can get fresh horses. I can buy a team at Nuceria."

"Can you pay for a team?" I interrupted. "Have you the cash?"

"My gold and silver," she laughed, "are in the other secret compartment. The outlaws did not get my coin any more than my jewelry. Why look! Lydia's earrings are in my ears now and her necklace round my neck and her bracelets on my wrists and her rings on

my fingers. The rascals were so sure of not being interfered with and so much at ease that they were startled frantic by the galloping horsemen and scuttled off with Bambilio's coin-chest, dragging him and poor Lydia and totally forgetting me, thinking me the maid, not even noticing these little trinkets, which are mostly silver and some of gold and so worth stealing.

"I have the cash to pay for two teams or three: I brought plenty for the journey to Aquileia, because we could learn little of the state of the roads beyond Bononia and I thought I might have to travel by Placentia or even by Milan. I'll get back to Rome, as fast as I can. I don't want to be married now, so I don't want to go on to Bononia, let alone all the way to Aquileia. If I did want to go on, the bandits have run off with my maid, and I could hardly get along without her, and they have also removed my escort, and I certainly could not keep on without a proper escort. I have every excuse for turning about at once and making haste to get out of this dangerous neighborhood and getting back home.

"Poor Lydia! I hate to think of her at the mercy of those brutal ruffians. They may maltreat her horribly if they discover that they have the maid instead of the mistress, and by the maid's device. I'll tell everybody I see that I'll pay any ransom in reason, even beyond reason, for poor Lydia, if the brigands will restore her to me safe and sound. I fancy their friends hereabouts, and almost every inhabitant of the district is a friend of theirs, by your account, will speedily have conveyed to them the news that their capture is worth almost as much ransom as they hoped to extort for me. That news ought to protect Lydia while she is among the outlaws and ought to help me to get her back without much delay.

"As soon as I am in Rome I'll send a trusty agent up here to set on foot negotiations with the outlaws and to rescue Lydia by paying what they ask for her.

"And, the moment I reach Rome I'll set in motion all the forces I can control or enlist, and I can influence many men in high places, I'll have all I can influence working quietly and most unobtrusively for that official manumission, of yours. Once you are free you had best travel secretly and without haste to Bruttium. No folk are more secretive or more loyal than the herders and foresters of Bruttium. Not only your former slaves on your uncle's estate there, but all their neighbors will do as much to keep secret your presence among them, and shield you and to make you comfortable and happy as the Umbrians hereabouts have been doing to help and protect Bulla and his band and to shield them from the constabulary and authorities. In Bruttium you can lurk in safety as long as Commodus lives and it will even be safe for us two to exchange letters. In Bruttium it can be arranged that no secret-service agent or Imperial spy can ever get wind of your existence, let alone of your hiding-place. You can be free, in a way, housed

comfortably, with no duties, able to pass your time as you please, and well cared for. Tanno and I will see that you are supplied with cash for the journey and for your needs after you reach your haven."

The cocks crowed vociferously at all the neighboring farmsteads and we could hear them plainly across the considerable distances from us to each. The moon hung low and the pale first light of day began to overcome the moonlight.

Vedia petted me and I petted her and she repeated her vows of unalterable fidelity to her pledge to marry no one else and to hope to marry me.

As dawn brightened the hyenas burst into a belated chorus and a lion roared far away. After that the beasts made no sounds which came to our ears.

Vedia insisted on my eating more of her delicacies and, I confess, I ate liberally and with relish. A night with almost no sleep and much excitement causes an unnatural hunger at dawn and the delicious rarities tempted me.

She explained, over and over, that I was to behave precisely as if we had not encountered each other and be sure not to mistake some secret-service agent for her emissary. The watchword was to be, in memory of that used at my escape from Rome, that whoever came from her or Tanno to me would ask:

"Can you direct me to the leopard-tamer who rode the horse with the blue saddle-cloth?"

I was to reply:

"The blue saddle-cloth was bordered with silver."

He was then to respond:

"I have silver for the leopard-tamer."

I was then to say:

"I am the leopard-tamer and I have a pouch for your silver."

After we had rehearsed the passwords till both were sure neither could forget or misplace a word, as the day was coming on, we kept a keen lookout through the partly opened panels. Before sunrise I saw the mounted constables approaching down the

mountain trail, for there were several points on it where horsemen could be seen through the trees, even from where we were.

I unfastened the coach door next the swamp, we kissed each other again and again, and, as the horsemen came in sight away across the meadows where they emerged from the woods, we exchanged a last farewell kiss and I slipped out and across the swamp.

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