

Andivius Hedulio Vol.IV
By
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ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

DISSIMULATIONS

CHAPTER XXIX

FELIX

From the marsh my path homewards led me past the villa, for it was directly between my cottage and the swamp. The very first human being I encountered was the Villicus himself.

"Hullo, Felix," he said. "I've been looking for you. We need you. Septima says she hasn't seen you since early yesterday. Where have you been all night?"

"Up a tree," I replied. "Bulla told me day before yesterday that he and his lads planned a spectacular capture and robbery on the highway south of Diana's Crag for yesterday afternoon. Most of the days lately on which you haven't wanted me I have spent on top of the crag, watching the traffic on the road. I went up there about the third hour yesterday morning, to view the show Bulla had promised me. I expected to enjoy it, but, somehow, when I saw the victims' coaches come in sight, the idea of a Roman lady in the clutches of Bulla's gang went against my gorge. I ran down alongside the crag towards where Selinus was grazing in the roadside pasture. He came to me and I galloped up the highway and up the first crossroad to warn the constabulary, who had gone up that road about noon, on some false information given them by someone at Bulla's suggestion. Their officer took my horse and I had to run with the infantrymen. My breath gave out and my legs too and I dropped behind when they left the highway south of the crag and struck off across country after the bandits, who had been scared off by the cavalrymen. It took me a long time to get my breath and rest my legs. When I felt able to walk it was after sunset. I can gentle any beast by daylight, but after dusk I'm no better off than any other man facing a lion or tiger. The brigands had opened scores of cages and the freed beasts began to roar and snarl soon after sunset. I climbed a maple and spent the night in a fork about six yards from the ground, where I felt safe as long as I could keep awake. I dreaded to fall if I dozed, and I was frightfully drowsy after such a hot day and such a long run. When the sun rose I started home."

"Come along, prudent youth," he said, "we need you. The sub-procurator in charge of the beast-train which the brigands interfered with is at the villa: so are half his beast-tenders and teamsters. The animal-keepers vow they dare not attempt to recapture their charges and the procurator is angry and worried and anxious about his responsibility and what will be expected of him by his superiors. He does not want to lose one single

lion or tiger or even hyena; wants them recaged at once. So do I. I've lost more stock than I like to think of. The hyenas and panthers and leopards have slaughtered a host of my sheep and goats, and the lions and tigers have banqueted on some of my most promising colts and on many of my cattle.

"Can you duplicate your feat with the panther loose on the highway?"

"I can repeat it as often as I can get anywhere near any of those beasts by daylight," I said. "Let us start at once. There is no hurry, for the beasts will do little damage in daytime, as most of them will hide till dark. But there seems to be a large number loose; I doubt if I can catch all of them before dusk."

"It'll take you two days, Felix, or three," the Villicus laughed. "The procurator states that his train had in its cages twenty-five panthers, as many leopards, fifty tigers, a hundred lions and two hundred hyenas. That's four hundred beasts for you to catch as fast as they can be located by their keepers, assisted by my whole force of horse-wranglers, herdsmen, shepherds, and the rest and all the farmers hereabouts, and all their slaves. We'll have plenty of help. Three farmers are at the villa now raving over the loss of sheep or cattle; every farmer will turn out with his men to help us; anyhow, every bumpkin and yokel will want to enjoy the fun and they'll all flock to the scene."

I do not know how many days I spent catching the escaped beasts for the procurator. I enjoyed the first day, did not mind the second and was not painfully weary on the third; but the rest passed in a daze of exhaustion; though I had good horses, a fresh horse whenever I asked for it, wine and good wine as often as I was thirsty, plenty of good food and every consideration; and although the various farms at which I spent the nights (for we did not once return to the villa) did all they could for my comfort, the repetition, for hundreds of times, of dismounting, approaching a lion or tiger in his daylight lair among reeds or tall grass or bushes, catching him by the mane or the scruff of his neck, leading him to his cage and caging him, was extremely, even unbelievably exhausting.

Whenever any of our searchers located a beast in hiding the teamsters drove their wagons with his cage as near as might be; in no case did I lead a cowed captive half a mile; seldom two furlongs. But I walked a great distance in the course of each of these days, rode many miles in the course of all the riding I did between recaptures, and was never calmed between my recurrent periods of tense excitement. I felt limp.

My condition was not improved by the occurrence and recurrence of perturbing excitement from a more disquieting cause. Early on my third day of animal-catching, just as I stepped back from bolting the door of a cage on a lion, I felt rather than saw out of the tail of my eye someone rush towards me from behind, trip when a few yards from

me and fall flat. I whirled to look and beheld a mere lad, one of my fellow-slaves at the villa, a stable cleaner, scrambling to his feet. When he was half up the man nearest him, another of my fellow-slaves, an assistant colt-wrangler, apparently the man who had tripped him, dealt him a smashing blow on the ear with his clenched fist and felled him again. As he went down I saw that he had a long-bladed, keen-edged, gleaming dagger in his right hand. It flew from his grasp as he plowed up the ground with his face. The colt-wrangler picked it up.

We were on a crossroad, some distance from the highway, in the woods. The wagon and cage were surrounded by almost a score of the slaves of the estate, with nearly as many more helpers; farm-slaves, farmers, teamsters, beast-warders, yokels and stragglers; the Villicus was near.

"Napsus," he said to the colt-wrangler, "kill him with his own dagger!"

Instantly Napsus stabbed the fallen lad between the shoulders. The thrust went home neatly, under the left shoulder-blade, deep and inclined a little upward. It must have reached his heart, for he died after one violent convulsion which threw him into the air, and turned him completely over, his corpse slapping the ground like a flopping fish on a stream- bank.

"Hand me that rope!" the Villicus ordered a teamster.

He knotted a hangman's noose at one end of the rope, tried it to make sure it worked properly and ordered the estate slaves to hang the body to a convenient limb of a near by tree. They did.

I stood, gazing questioningly, first at the swinging corpse, then at the Villicus.

"Felix," said he, "I perceive that you do not understand. Tiro meant to kill you, and would most likely have succeeded had not Napsus first tripped him and then killed him. Napsus shall be handsomely rewarded in every fashion within my power. Tiro has been dealt with as he deserved, as any similar fool deserves. I propose to protect you to the extent of my abilities and authority, which includes peremptory execution of any estate slave whom I so much as suspect; I don't have to wait for any overt act, nor for any threat, uttered or whispered or hinted. You can rely on all the protection I can give you and I fancy it will suffice. If there is any other fool about let him take notice."

He spoke loudly, so as to be audible to everyone of the gathering.

I stared numb, puzzled, almost dazed.

"But," I blurted out, "why did he try to kill me? Why should anyone want to kill me?"

"You don't know Umbria, lad," spoke the Villicus, indulgently. "Many eyes in addition to those of the teamsters and beast-wardens beheld you on Selinus, galloping your fastest northwards along the highroad. Many saw you turn Selinus up the crossroad the viarii had taken. Many saw their officer on Selinus when the cavalrymen charged down the highroad and scattered the bandits. Many saw you afoot among the infantrymen when they turned from the crossroad into the highway and as they double-quickened down it. Every partisan of the outlaws blames you for their discomfiture, and regards you as a detestable traitor, many a one is looking for such a chance at you as Tiro thought he saw. I'll give you a body-guard of men I can trust, for the rest of this beast-catching job. But keep a bright lookout, yourself. You may need all your own strength and quickness to save yourself."

The strain of this surprise and anxiety was a hundredfold as trying as the most daunting beast-catching. I felt it.

I felt it more after a second similar attempt that very afternoon. I had threaded a dense patch of undergrowth, approached a lurking leopard, caught her and led her out of the thicket, led her almost to her waiting cage. By this time our helpers were so used to seeing me cage lions, panthers, leopards and tigers that they no longer, as at first, hovered at a distance, gaping at me as I, completely alone with my catch, led it towards its cage, set ready by its wagon, from which the team had been loosed and removed: no longer drew off some yards beyond the cage and wagon and stood ready for instant flight if my capture escaped me; they now merely drew aside as I approached and opened a lane for me and my charge, no more afraid than if I had been leading a calf.

As I drew near the cage, my mind intent on the leopard and my eyes on the open cage door and its fastenings, a slave of one of the neighboring farmers dashed at me, sheath-knife uplifted. He came from my left side, from a little behind me. I whirled round to face him, pulling the leopard round roughly, so that she snarled. I let her go. She was face to face with my reckless assailant and they were close together. She gave one joyful, gloating, triumphant squall and one mighty leap. Her claws sank into his shoulders, her long white fangs met, horridly crunching, in his throat, and she bore him to the earth where she crouched flat on him, greedily gulping his blood.

The bystanders fairly fell over backwards in their panic as they scattered. I stood by the leopard, and when she had exhausted the supply of hot blood, succeeded in caging her; but dropped limp on the earth once I had fastened her in her cage, for a beast of prey

which had just tasted human blood was a ward with which I had felt very uncertain of being able to cope.

After that no one attempted to molest me while out catching the escaped beasts. But the night before my last day of beast-catching, as I lay abed very fast asleep at a villa fully ten miles from the Imperial villa where I belonged, I became gradually aware of some noises, then slowly I wakened. There was a fight going on at my door. Soon after I got out of bed our host and my master, the Villicus, came with a light and three or four slaves. The light revealed One of my fellow-slaves flat on his back and another throttling him. A dagger lay on the floor. Evidently the one had saved me from the other.

Late next afternoon, far up in the hills near Helvillum, I caught and caged the last hyena. These, being smaller and more cowardly than the nobler animals, were harder to locate. It was after sunset when we reached the villa where we found the procurator in charge of the beast-train; and along with, him and his men were welcomed and entertained.

After our bath and a lavish dinner the Villicus exchanged a few whispered words with our host and then he and I had a long conference alone. He explained that my life was in danger, not only from local friends of Bulla and partisans of the King of the Highwaymen who all not merely regarded me with detestation and hatred as a traitor but suspected me of being a government spy, but also from the King of the Highwaymen himself, who was certain to be informed by Bulla of how they had been discomfited and who had a long arm and countless capable and intrepid agents. He was of the opinion that the three attempts at assassination which I had escaped were a mere beginning. He was emphatic that I could not remain on the Imperial estate and survive many days. He advised me strongly not to return to the villa.

Then he told me that the procurator of the beast-train had sent to Rome by an Imperial courier, whom he had managed to intercept at a change-station, a letter setting forth my powers over fierce animals and asking that an order be sent for my transfer from the horse-breeding estate to the Beast Barracks attached to the Colosseum, where the animals are housed from their arrival in Rome, until their display in the arena; that this letter had come into the hands of the same officials who already had under consideration the requisition for me made by the procurator in charge of the Beast Barracks; that somehow these same officials appeared to know nothing of my identity with the slave who had foiled the conspirators who were fomenting a mutiny in the ergastulum at Nuceria, and for whose manumission a request had been made by the aldermen of that town, and indeed appeared to know nothing of any such request for manumission; that a requisition for my transfer from the horse-breeding estate to the Beast- Barracks at Rome had been made out, approved by the higher officials, sealed, stamped and sent out by an Imperial courier and received that very afternoon by the

procurator of the beast-train, who consequently had authority to take me to Rome with him as one of the attendants on the animals of his train, which was now again in order, I having recaged all the four hundred escaped beasts, except five hyenas, one panther and one lion which had been killed by stock-owners and their slaves while attacking stock.

The Villicus went on to say that this fell out very advantageously for me, in his opinion. He advised me not only to go with the procurator without demur, but to arrange with him that I drop the name of Felix and adopt some other. He pointed out that, if it was known that Felix the Horse-wrangler of Umbria had gone to Rome as Felix the Beast-Tamer, then the King of the Highwaymen would be able without difficulty to trace me and set on me his ruthless agents until one of them assassinated me.

I felt that he was right. The danger to my former self as Andivius Hedulio, implicated in a conspiracy against Caesar, appeared now far off and unimportant, in spite of the fact that the secret service might still be keen to catch me and the hue and cry out after me from the Alps to Rhegium; the danger to my present self from the enmity of Bulla, of his ruffians, of their partisans in Umbria, of their Chief, the King of the Highwaymen, whoever he might be, appeared close and menacing. A change of name would make it impossible for Tanno and Vedia to carry out her plan for my manumission by the fiscus, my clandestine journey to Bruttium and my comfortable and unsuspected seclusion there until some other prince succeeded our present Emperor. I had grasped eagerly at the thought of this plan and had built much on it. But I realized that Bulla's admirers or the agents of the King of the Highwaymen would make an end of me long before Vedia's influence could obtain my manumission; and that, if she did accomplish all she expected, I could never hope to escape the vigilance of the tenacious and expert pursuers who would inevitably dog my footsteps.

I thought the advice of the Villicus good. I regretted that I was not to say farewell to Septima; she deserved a most fervent expression of my esteem, gratitude, regard and good wishes; but, after my encounter with Vedia, Septima seemed of very little importance. I had my amulet-bag on its thong about my neck and my coin-belt about my waist. I agreed to go with the procurator and thanked the Villicus for his solicitude for me, for his good offices and for his advice.

He said that it would be best that he should not know what name I meant to adopt. Also he said that, if I was to escape the vengeance of the King of the Highwaymen, it would be imperative that I be thought dead; he would give out that I had been killed by one of my fellow-slaves and everybody would assume that I had perished at the hands of some partisan of the outlaws; Bulla and the King of the Highwaymen would feel their animosity satiated.

I reflected that whereas news of my supposed assassination would fill Vedia with grief and would probably, after her grief abated, leave her feeling free to marry, yet, if a false report of my death was not spread abroad, a genuine report of my actual death soon would be. It was a choice between a lesser and a greater evil. I acquiesced.

I then ventured to ask him if he knew anything as to how far the brigands had succeeded in spite of my intervention and how far they had failed because of it. He told me that they had effected their escape with the propraetor's coin-chests, the propraetor, and the procurator and had carried off the widow's maid by mistake for the widow, on account of her clever device of changing clothes with her mistress.

Also that Vedia had announced that she would pay a large ransom for her maid.

I then felt safe to ask what had become of Vedia, her name being known from her advertisement. He said she had procured horses and mules and had returned to Rome, sending up agents from Nuceria to negotiate with the bandits, rescue Lydia and pay her ransom.

The next day, at dawn, I set off with the beast-train, riding by the procurator. He and I and the Villicus had had a talk. After the Villicus left my name was Festus.

I asked the procurator what had become of the bullion on account of which the brigands had routed out the cages. He laughed and asked whether I had noted anything peculiar in the handling of the cages while I was returning their contents to them. I said I had noticed that the rollers lashed to the wagons were never used, but fresh-cut rollers each time a cage was taken off a wagon or put back on.

He laughed again.

"You can conjecture then," he said, "why the outlaws got no grain of the dust, let alone any nugget: six hundred rollers, even with very moderate holes bored into half of them, would hold more bullion than the procurator was convoying."

I laughed also.

"I suppose," I said, "it could not be told which rollers were bored out and might crush if used."

"Just so!" said he.

We journeyed to Rome with as much hurry as could be made by such a beast- train, which was very slowly for men on good horses. We made excursions up crossroads, idled at inns, were entertained at villas and I decidedly enjoyed the beginning of my life as Festus the Beast-Tamer. We were fourteen full days on the road.

I had time to meditate on the fifth fulfillment of the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl. Also I had time to offer two white hens to Mercury at Nuceria, at Spolitum, at Interamnia, at Narnia and at Ocriculum.

Towards sunset just before our last night's halt out of the city, from a hilltop on the highway, I had a glorious view of Rome bathed in mellow evening sunlight, much as I had viewed it when I came down the same highroad with the mutineers from Britain. As always this unsurpassable sight filled me with intense emotions.

We entered Rome, of course, by the Flaminian Gate and at dawn. Before sunrise I was in the great mass of buildings variously known as the Choragium, the Therotheca, the Animal Mansions and the Beast-Barracks. These were mostly of many stories, the ground-level used for the beasts, the second floor for their keepers and attendants, the cage-cleaners, the overseers, and the rest of the army of men who cared for the animals, and the upper floors utilized as store-rooms for all sorts of weapons, armor, costumes, implements and apparatus used in and for the spectacles; swords, spears, arrows, shields, helmets, breast-plates, corselets, kilts, greaves, boots, cloaks, tunics, poles, rope, pulleys, winches, jack- screws, derricks, wagons, carts, and the like.

The jumble of buildings was without any sort of general plan. Apparently a courtyard and the structures about it had been found necessary for housing the beasts and their attendants and had been bought by the management of the Colosseum. When it was overtaxed, as the number of animals exhibited increased, an adjacent property had been acquired and annexed. So the Choragium had been created and extended till it now covered many acres and had many courtyards, all arcaded on all sides. Under the arcades were set as many cages as they could accommodate; when the beasts were too numerous for their cages to be all under the arcades some were stood out in the courtyards.

I was comfortably housed in light, airy, roomy, clean and well-furnished quarters on one of the biggest courtyards. From dawn after my first night's sleep there I was busy quelling vicious beasts so their cages could be cleaned; keeping others quiet while the beast-surgeons dressed wounds inflicted by their captors or keepers or sores caused by their confinement; inducing others to swallow the remedies the animal-doctors thought good for them; leading beasts out of their cages into others; and so on.

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Before I had been a full day at my duties the procurator of the Beast- Barracks complimented me, declared that I was his very ideal of just the kind of man he had always needed and wanted, averred that I was already indispensable and vowed that he could not conceive how he or the Choragium had ever gotten on without me. Within a very few days he came to my quarters and said:

"I want you to be contented here. I won't listen to a word hinting at your leaving. Otherwise I'll do all I can to gratify every wish of yours not inconsistent with your continuing here and keeping up as you have begun. Of course, within a few days now, you'll have no such rush of all-day toil as you have been having. You have been doing in the past few days all the left-over jobs which should have been attended to since warm weather began. Once you get clear of legacies from the past you'll find a day's work can be done in much less than a day and will neither exhaust nor weary you. Now what can I do to make you as comfortable as possible?"

He had sat down and had motioned me to be seated also. I ruminated.

"In the first place," I said, "I do not want to be made to show off in the arena before audiences. I am willing to tame animals and to keep on taming animals, but I do not want to be forced to display my powers before the populace and the nobility, Senate and court. I have the most powerful antipathy to being compelled to become a performer as part of a public spectacle."

"Set your mind at rest," he said. "I give my pledge that, unless my authority is overridden, you shall not take part in public spectacles except that you may often have to enter the arena to lead out ferocious beasts which are not to be killed or which the Emperor, or some of the courtiers, senators, nobles or populace have taken a fancy to for some display of courage or craft and have ordered spared. The driving into a cage or out of a postern of such a beast is generally an irritating matter, delaying the spectacle and often calling for the use of as many as a hundred muscular, agile and bold attendants. I perceive that you can do alone, quickly and easily, what a large gang of eager men has often taken a long time to accomplish. Often they have to kill a recalcitrant beast. I feel that I need you for this and I trust that you are willing."

"Entirely," I answered.

"Good!" said he, and resumed:

"Now, what is your next point?"

"In the second place," I said, "I do not want to be pestered with visitors; nobles or wealthy idlers who take a fancy to me and think they are conferring a favor on me by intruding on me and wasting my time with their inquisitive questions and patronizing remarks. In particular I have a horror of the kind of women who have a fad for molesting with their attentions singers, actors, gladiators, beast-fighters, charioteers and so on; if one of them gets after me and the infection spreads to more I shall find life here in Rome altogether unendurable.

"I speak feelingly (I thought it proper to lie like a Greek, if necessary, in a situation like mine). Where I was before I suffered from the attentions of enthusiastic admirers and I have had all I want of it and far more; enough to last half a dozen lifetimes."

"Festus," said the procurator, "where were you before?"

"If you had seen my back," I said, "you wouldn't expect me to tell you."

"I don't expect you to tell me," he laughed, "but I could not help asking; you are such a wonder that I am tormented with the desire to know all about you, not merely where you came from and how you got into the ergastulum at Nuceria. But I shall not press you for any information about yourself. Keep your own secrets as long as you are willing to work miracles for me.

"I don't want to see your back; without seeing it I may say that if anyone ill-treated you he was an amazing fool. You shall not be flogged here, nor ill-used in any way. I'll take all the measures in my power to ensure that no visitors bother you and that you are protected not only from genuine sporting nobles but still more from the silly loungers who think it adds to their importance to make the acquaintance of all persons of public reputation. Especially I'll have you guarded from intrusive fine ladies."

"What next?"

"I want plenty of the best fruit," I said boldly.

"You'll get all you can eat of whatever the markets afford," he said, "and understand right here that I'll indulge you to any extent in anything relating to your food or wine, as long as you keep sober. Similarly you can have anything you ask for in the way of extra clothing or bedding or furnishings for your quarters. If you don't like the slave detailed to wait on you I'll have another put in his place and keep on changing till you get one to suit you.

"You are to be indulged and pampered in every way in my power, except that I mean to keep you hard at work, long hours each day, at the cages, whenever it is necessary."

I thanked him and agreed to do my best to please him.

Not many days later, as he had foretold, my work became less continuous and less burdensome. Soon afterwards I settled into a sort of daily routine which occupied me, but did not wear me out and which often left me not a little free time.

I found that I was entirely free to go and come as I pleased, when not occupied. I did go to the Temple of Mercury and offer two white hens bought in the Forum Boarium, as I had done when in the City with Maternus. Otherwise I kept pretty close for more than a month. I feared to be recognized as myself by some secret-service agent; I feared almost as much to be identified as Felix the Horse-Tamer by some henchman of the King of the Highwaymen. I wanted to try to communicate with Vedia, but the more I pondered on how to do so the more I saw only betrayal, recognition and death as the probable results of every plan I devised.

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CHAPTER XXX FESTUS

Domiciled in the Choragium and busy there and in the Colosseum I spent almost a year. Until the approach of winter put a stop to spectacles in the arena and after the outset of spring permitted their resumption, I was not only continuously busy, but entirely contented. Of the dreary and tedious winter between, which was intensely dispiriting and appeared interminable, the less I say the better. I do not want to remind myself of it.

I was of course free from the bodily miseries which had made my winters at Placentia and Nuceria so terrible: I did not suffer from cold, hunger, vermin, sleeplessness, overwork, exhaustion, weakness, blows and abuse. I was, on the contrary, comfortably lodged and clothed, well attended, lavishly and excellently fed and humored by the procurator.

But at Placentia and Nuceria I had solaced myself amid the horror of my situation by reminding myself that I was, at least, alive, and, as long as I was in an ergastulum, entirely safe from any danger of being recognized and executed. Here, in Rome, often in the arena, under the eyes of sixty thousand Romans, thousands of whom had known me in my prosperity and hundreds of whom had known me familiarly from my childhood, I was, every instant, in peril of recognition and of betrayal to the secret service. While I was actually in the arena I was so busy or so exhilarated by my participation in the most magnificent spectacle on earth that I never worried a moment. I seldom worried while I was occupied with any of my duties in the Colosseum or Choragium, although I knew I was very liable to recognition, for the passages and vaults of the Colosseum and the courtyards of the Choragium were habitually visited by men of sporting tastes; gentlemen, wealthy idlers, noblemen, senators, courtiers, even the Emperor himself. I was, in my intellect, conscious of my danger; but, while I was occupied, it did not perturb my feelings.

During the idleness of the long winter my peril did rob me of sleep, of appetite and of peace of mind. I had continually to devise excuses for remaining in my lodgings, for declining invitations to banquets, for keeping to myself. I dreaded that the procurator himself was growing suspicious of me. He had, in the kindness of his heart, thrown in my way offers of opportunities for outings, for diversions, for entertainments, which any man in my situation might have been expected to accept with alacrity. My refusals, I felt, might set him to thinking. He was entirely loyal to the Emperor and the government. If the idea ever crossed his mind he would, at once, have reported to the secret service that

it would be well to take a look at Festus the Beast-Tamer; he might be other than he appeared. The anxiety caused by these thoughts preyed upon my mind.

Without reason, apparently. The procurator, as I look back on that deadly winter, seems to have accepted all my peculiarities without question. If I would remain content and quell obstreperous beasts when spring opened as I had until autumn ushered in winter, I might do and be anything I pleased. If I pleased to mope in my quarters, pace under the arcades of the courtyard, lie abed from early dusk till after sunrise, what mattered that to him? Such, apparently, was his attitude of mind. He gave orders that I was to have my meals alone in my quarters, as I requested. He had brought to me, from the libraries of the Basilica Ulpia, most of the books I asked for. I had read all the books on catching, caring for, curing, managing, taming and fighting beasts which formed the library of the Choragium. After they were exhausted I asked the procurator for more. As he had a cousin among the assistant curators at the Ulpian Library he was able to gratify me. After I could learn of no more books on beasts I took to comedies and read Naevius, all of Menander and Caecilius, and most of the best plays of other writers of comedies; then I turned to histories, which I thought safe, and spent my days for the remainder of the winter sleeping early, long and late, eating abundant meals of good food, walking miles round and round the big courtyard under the empty arcades, exercising in the gymnasium of the Choragium, steaming and parboiling and half-roasting myself in its small but very well-appointed and well-served baths, and, otherwise, reading every bit of my daylight. I kept well and I remained safe, ignored and unnoticed. The procurator kept his word as to shielding me from visitors, and he said he had much ado to succeed, for the ease and certitude with which, in the open arena, before all Rome, I approached a lion or tiger which had just slaughtered a criminal and lapped his blood, seized the beast by the mane or scruff of the neck, as if he had been a tame dog, and led him to a postern or into his cage, roused much interest, much curiosity, many enquiries and not a little desire to see me closer, question me, talk with me, get acquainted with me and learn the secret of my power.

I thanked the procurator for his resolution and success in rebuffing would-be patrons eager to pamper me. Also, all winter, I dreaded that he would be less lucky or less adamant when spring came.

Thus passed my fourth winter since my disaster.

I might have been spared much of my anxiety during the winter if I had learned sooner that such aloofness as mine was no novelty to the procurator, that he had, among his most valued subordinates, a man even more unsociable than I, and even more highly esteemed and more sedulously pampered. This was the celebrated and regretted Spaniard, Mercablis, who, for more than thirty years, was accorded by the Choragium a

home of his. own, a retinue of servants and the fulfillment of every whim, of which the chief was his determination to have as little as possible to do with any human being except his wife and their three children, for he was not a slave, but a freeman. In his way Mercablis was as celebrated as Felix Bulla the brigand or Agyllius Septentrio the actor of mimes, and the memory of his fame yet lingers in the recollections of the aged and in the talk of their children and grandchildren. For it was Mercablis who, for half a life-time, invented, rehearsed, and kept secret till the moment of its display the noon-hour sensational surprise for each day of games in the Colosseum.

I have, in my later years, met many persons who congratulated me on my luck in having personally known and frequently talked with Mercablis, just as many have similarly envied me my encounters with Felix Bulla. For myself I have never plumed myself on such features of my adventures, though they are not unpleasing to recall.

When, in the spring of the next year, while Fuscianus and Silanus were consuls, I came to know Mercablis and to consider him, I arrived at the conclusion that his inclination for solitude and his aloofness were not the result of any dread of strangers or of any need for seclusion, like mine, but the product of a disposition naturally churlish, crabbed, and unsocial.

Habituated as the procurator had been to Mercablis and his loathing for strangers, my desire for privacy had seemed to him as a matter of course.

Resolute as Mercablis was to be let alone, he was enormously vain and self-conceited and puffed up with his conviction of his own importance. He never smiled, but some subtle alteration in his countenance betrayed that any flattery pleased him.

He was a tall, spare, bony man, with a dry, brown, leathery skin, lean legs and arms, a stringy neck, almost no chin, a hooked nose, deep set little greeny-gray eyes and intensely black, harsh, stiff, curly hair and very bushy eyebrows. He wore old, worn, faded garments and stalked about as if the fate of the universe depended on him.

Certainly he never failed to surprise all Rome when the time came for his novelty to be displayed. Every one which I saw, either earlier when I was myself or while in the Choragium as Festus the Beast-Wizard or later, justified the claim of Mercablis to being the most original-minded sensation-deviser ever known in the Colosseum or elsewhere.

One of his utterly unpredictable surprises recurs often to my recollection.

It was a hot July day and, during the noon pause, the vendors of cooling drinks did a good business among the spectators of the upper tiers. To the ring-rope round the

opening in the awning, over the middle of the arena, had been fastened a big, strong, pulley block. One of the lightest and most agile of the awning-boys hung by his hands from the radial rope stretched from nearest that pulley, worked out to it, sat on it, rove through it a light cord which he carried coiled at his waist, and worked back along the radial rope, leaving the cord trailing from the pulley-wheel to the sand of the arena. By means of the cord the arena-slaves rove through the pulley first a light rope, then a very strong one.

The end of this rope they fastened to an iron ring, from which hung four stout chains, three of them of equal length, each about thirty feet, whose lower ends, at points precisely equidistant from each other, were fastened to a big iron hoop all of twenty-four feet across. From the hoop hung six lighter chains, like the fourth chain which hung from the ring. As the six were fastened to the hoop either where one of the upper chains ended or exactly between two of them each of the six was precisely twelve feet from those on either side of it and from the center chain hanging from the ring. The hoop hung perfectly level and each of the seven chains, about thirty feet below the level of the hoop, had hung to it an iron disk, a yard or more across, hanging by a ring-bolt in its center and perfectly level. From a second ring-bolt in the underside of each disk depended more of the same light, strong chain, to a length of some thirty feet below the disks.

I, like all the arena-slaves and Choragium-slaves, like all the spectators, knew that this apparatus portended some unpredictable surprise; but I, like the others, like the audience, gaped at it, incredulous and unable to conjecture what it could be for.

Then arena-slaves carried in and set down on the sand a full hundred feet from the hoop and chains, a dozen or more wicker crates full of quacking white ducks with yellow bills. They and the noise they made recalled unpleasantly to me my sensations as I clung to the alder bush immersed in Bran Brook, after Agathemer and I had crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia.

Then there was a delay and I was called out to assist the mahout of the Choragium's best trick elephant, the smallest full-grown elephant I ever saw and the worst-dispositioned elephant of any age or size which ever I encountered. When I and the mahout had put him in a good humor he entered the arena and stationed himself by the crates of quacking ducks.

Then there marched out into the arena a procession of arena-slaves, four by four, each four carrying by two poles a strong cage housing a big African ape. These cages they set down each under one of the chains depending from the hoop. Then I was called to deal with the baboons.

Now I fear no beast, but of all beasts I most dislike an African ape. These creatures, inhabiting the mountains of Mauretania, Gaetulia and the Province of Africa, are big as a big dog and have teeth as long and cruel as any big dog. They are violent and treacherous. Whereas any wild bear or wolf I ever approached would permit me to handle him without snarling or growling, every baboon I ever had to handle made some sort of threatening noise inside him. Although none ever bit me or attempted any attack on me yet the hideousness of such apes and their vile odor always made me timid in dealing with them.

Each of these seven had around his middle an iron hoop-belt, with a strong ring-bolt in the back. It was my task to affix the end of each pendant chain to the ring-bolt in the belt of one of the baboons. This was easy to do, as each cage, in addition to a door in one side, had a trap-door in its top; and each chain had a snap-hook ringed to its last link. More difficult was managing so that the apes should be hauled up out of their cages without any two swinging sideways enough to clutch each, other; for, while baboons in their native haunts hunt in packs, male baboons not of the same pack always fight venomously and members of the same pack, if separated for a time, are as hostile to each other as males of different packs.

By care and caution, the slaves at the rope obeying my signals promptly, I at last had all seven apes clear of their cages, and not swinging too much. Then the cages were removed and the hoop lowered somewhat. Then I steadied each chain till none had any side-ways swing. Each ape finally hung on a level with every other ape, and about two yards above the sand of the arena.

I say finally, for it was at once manifest why the disks were hung to the chains; each baboon swarmed up his chain; each got no higher than the disk, for it was too broad for his arm to reach the chain above it, so that each failed to climb past it, and, after some chattering, and hesitation, each climbed down his chain again and hung by his belt, every one mewling and chattering at his neighbors, frantic with hostility and eager for a fight.

When all seven were quiet the herald proclaimed that wagers might now be laid on the apes, the survivor of the seven to be the winner. Each had a different color painted on his iron ring: blue, green, red, yellow and so on. The spectators appeared to make bets.

Then when the arena was clear between the elephant and the baboons and beyond them, the mahout spoke to his charge, the elephant inserted his trunk through the opened lid of a crate of ducks, grasped a duck by the neck, lifted it out, swung it, and hurled it at the

hanging apes. It hurtled through the air, napping its wings in vain, and passed between the baboons, they grabbing for it as it shot by, it falling far beyond them on the sand.

A roar of appreciative yells rose from the spectators.

The elephant threw another duck and another. The third came within reach of one ape. He seized it and bit it savagely, tearing it to pieces with vicious glee. Its impact set him swinging.

Duck after duck was hurled till another baboon caught and rent another. This went on till two of the swinging apes came within grasping distance of each other. At once they grappled, bit each other and fought till one was killed.

It made a queer spectacle; the crates of quacking ducks, the thin-legged, blackskinned, turbaned mahout, the wickedly comprehending little elephant, the chattering baboons, the ducks hurtling through the air, and running about the sand all over the arena, for many of them fell and escaped alive, the yelling spectators of the upper tiers, the mildly amused parties in the Imperial and senatorial boxes, the blaze of sun over everything.

The duck-throwing was continued till only one ape remained alive.

It was all very exciting and so whimsically odd that it was acclaimed a most successful surprise. It is yet remembered by those who saw it or heard of it from them as the most spectacular and peculiar of all the inventions of the lamented Mercablis.

Of my experiences while in the Choragium and about the amphitheater the most notable were my opportunities for observing Commodus as a beast-fighter, the passion for the sport which possessed him, his absorption in it, even rage for it, his unflagging interest in it, his untiring pursuit of it, and his amazing strength and astounding skill in the use of arrows, spears, swords, and even clubs as weapons for killing beasts.

Keen as was his enjoyment of his own dexterity and fond as he was of displaying it to admiring and applauding onlookers, infatuated as he was with the intoxication of butchery, proficiency and adulation, he retained sufficient vestiges of decency and self-respect to restrain him from exhibiting himself as a beast-fighter in public spectacles before all Rome. Of late years I have heard not a few persons declare and maintain that they had seen and recognized him in the arena during the mornings of public festivals; that his outline, attitudes, movements and his manner of handling a sword, a club, a spear or a bow were unmistakable. I asseverate that these persons were and are self-deceived, or talking idly or repeating what they have heard from others or merely lying. Commodus never so far debased himself as to take his stand in the arena of the

Colosseum on the morning of a public spectacle with all Rome looking on; still less did he ever disgrace himself by actually killing beasts in full sight of the whole populace. I speak from full knowledge. I know.

I may remark here that, taking the other extreme from these detractors or gossips, there exist persons who maintain that Commodus never drove a chariot in public, let alone as a competing jockey in a succession of races in the Circus Maximus on a regular festival day in full view of all Rome; likewise that he not only never, as a gladiator, killed an adversary in public combat, but never so much as shed blood in any of his fights; asserting that he merely practised with lath foils inside the Palace.

These latter persons are of the class who are horrified that a Prince of the Republic should have debased himself as did Commodus, who feel that it is discreditable to Imperial Majesty in general that such shameful occurrences took place and who are foolish enough to fancy that harm done may be undone by forgetting what happened, by whispering about it, by keeping silent, by hushing up as much as possible all reports of it, by expunging all mention of it from the public records, by garbling histories and annals so as to make it appear that Commodus merely longed to do and practiced or played at doing what he actually did.

These wiseacres are as far from the truth as his libellers and slanderers.

If anything in addition to my solemn assertion is needful to convince any reader of this chronicle that I am right, let me remind him that all Rome knew or knew of Palus the Gladiator, afterwards of Palus the Charioteer, later yet again of Palus the Gladiator; of Palus, the unsurpassable, the inimitable, the incomparable: incomparable in his ease, his grace, his lighthness, his agility, his quickness, his amazing capacity for seeing the one right thing to do, the one thing which no other man could have thought of, and for doing it without a sign of perturbation, haste or effort, yet swift as lightning, with the effectiveness of Jove's thunderbolts and with the joyousness of a happy lad; always the same Palus and always in every dimension, attitude and movement the picture, the image, the double of Commodus: whereas no one ever heard or saw Palus the Beast-Fighter.

I think the chief reason why Commodus could not resist the temptation to degrade himself to the level of a public character and a public gladiator, yet, despite his infatuation for beast-killing, shrank from dishonoring himself by appearing at a public festival as a beast-fighter, was that beast-fighters are not merely more despised than charioteers or gladiators but the contempt felt for them has in it quite a different quality from that felt for gladiators and charioteers. Everybody sees criminals killed by beasts and there are all sorts of variations in the manner in which criminals are exposed to

death by wild animals. Some are turned naked and weaponless into the arena to be mangled by lions or bears or other huge beasts: others are left clad in their tunics; some of these are allowed the semblance of a weapon; a club, knife, dagger or light javelin; so that their appearance of having some chance may make their destruction more diverting to the spectators: others, in order to prolong their agonies, are furnished with real weapons, as a sword, a pike, a trident, even a hunting spear with a full-sized triangular head, its edges honed sharp as razors; others are left completely clad, with or without sham weapons or actual arms, yet others are protected by armor, corselets, kilts, greaves, or even hip-boots and helmets, and wear swords and carry shields as well as pikes or spears: these last differ in appearance in no respect from professional beast-fighters.

This produces, in the minds of persons of all classes a sort of confusion between beast-fighters and criminals and brings it about that there attaches to those persons of noble-birth or free-birth who, whether from hope of gain, from poverty, or from infatuation with the sport or from mere bravado, abase themselves as beast-fighters, an obloquy far intenser than that which attaches to freemen or nobles who dishonor themselves by becoming gladiators or charioteers. Such self-abasements have been known ever since the reign of Nero, began to become more common under Domitian and have ceased to be regarded as anything unusual; in fact, so many men of good birth or even of high birth have become gladiators or charioteers, so many of these have acquired popularity, so many, even if actually few, have won wealth and fame, that professional charioteering or swordsmanship has almost ceased to be regarded as a degradation. Not so beast-fighting. No one can point to a record of any freeman or noble having appeared in the arena as a beast-fighter and afterwards having regained by any acquisition whether of reputation or fortune the position in society which he had forfeited by his dishonor.

At any rate, Commodus gratified his enthusiasm, for beast-killing in two entirely different ways. One was by regaling the people with spectacles of unheard-of, even of incredible magnificence, at which not only the noon-hour was filled with ingenious and novel feats of trick-riding, tightrope-walking, jugglery, acrobatics and the like, and one of the surprises invented by Mercablis and the afternoons ennobled by hosts of gladiators, paired or fighting by fours, sixes or tens, twenties or in battalions, as if soldiers in actual battles; but the mornings were exciting with the slaughter of hordes of animals of all kinds; with fights of ferocious beasts, and with, the fighting and killing of fierce animals by the most expert and venturesome beast-fighters. At these spectacles Commodus participated as a spectator, in the Imperial Pavilion, surrounded by his officials and the great officers of his household, clad in his princely robes, seated on his gold-mounted ivory throne.

His other method of gratifying his infatuation was by himself killing all sorts of beasts, either from the coping of the arena, or from platforms constructed out on the arena or from the level of the sand itself, for which feats he had as spectators the whole Senate and the entire body of our nobility, summoned by special invitation and most of them by no means reluctant to enjoy the spectacle of the superlative prowess possessed by their Prince.

When any of the Vestals were present at these eccentric exhibitions they occupied their front-row box and Marcia usually sat with them, generally accompanied by as many of her intimates among the wives of senators as the box would accommodate. The Vestals, as the only human beings in Rome who did not fear Commodus, were often entirely independent in their behavior and refused his invitations; but they did it politely, alleging that the regulations of their cult forbade any Vestal absenting herself from the Temple and Atrium on that particular day. When no Vestal was present Marcia occupied their box, by their invitation, and filled it with her noblest and wealthiest favorites among the senatorial matrons, often wives of ex-consuls.

On these occasions Commodus wore fulldress boots of a shape precisely as with his official robes but not of the usual color: they had indeed the Imperial eagles embroidered on them in gold thread, but, instead of being of sky-blue dull-finished leather, they were of a shiny, glaze-surfaced leather as white as milk, their soles gilded along the edges. Gold embroidery set off his tunic, which was of the purest white silk, shimmering brilliantly. He always wore many gold rings, set with rubies and emeralds; also an elaborate necklace matching his rings. His bright, soft, curly, yellow hair haloed his face as did his almost as bright and fully as yellow and curly beard. His eyes were very bright blue, his cheeks very red. He was very handsome. The expression of vacuous miscomprehension like that on the face of a country bumpkin, which was so usual with Commodus when dealing with official business or social duties, never appeared on his countenance when revelling in his favorite sport: then his expression was intelligent, lively and even charming.

He was at this time in his twenty-sixth year and in the very prime of his life. Before his death, instead of the rosininess of health on his face and the glow of youth on his cheeks, his entire countenance was unbecomingly flushed and florid, like that of a drunkard.

His weapons were as exquisitely designed and finished as his costume. When he used a club it was of the wood of some Egyptian palm or of cornel-wood, heavily gilded; a heap of such clubs was always in readiness when he entered the arena. Similarly there was ready for him an arsenal of swords, of every style, shape and size, from short Oscan swords not much longer than daggers to Gallic swords with blades a full yard long and thin as kitchen spits. All were gold-hilted, sheathed in colored, tooled, embroidered,

gilded or even bejewelled leather; many had their blades gilded except the edges and points. There was piled up ready for his choice a mountain of spears, of patterns as various as the swords. All had their shafts whitened with some novel sort of paint which produced a gleaming effect like the sheen of the white portions of the finer sorts of decorated Greek vases. This glaze effect was over all of each shaft except at the grip, where the natural wood always appeared, roughened like the surface of a file with criss-cross lines to afford him a surer grasp. His bows were all gilded, his quivers gilded or of gem-studded, brightly tinted leather, in many colored patterns; his arrows gilded all over, points, shafts and feathers; or with feathers dyed red, blue, green or violet. Every detail of his get-up and equipment was to the last degree perfect, reliable, beautiful, unusual and costly.

I pondered a great deal over his infatuation and its consequences.

In the first place, as when contemplating the torrent of beast-wagons flowing down the Flaminian Highroad, I was, being still inwardly a Roman noble, overwhelmed with shame that the enormous, but even so insufficient, revenues of the Republic should be diverted from their proper uses for the maintenance of our prosperity and the defence of the frontiers of the Empire and squandered on the silly amusements of a great, hulking, empty-headed lad.

Then I was almost equally ashamed that a man who could, on occasion, if sufficiently roused, be, for a space, as completely Prince and Emperor as Commodus had repeatedly shown himself in my sight, could, on the other hand, waste his time and energies on displaying his dexterity in feats of archery, javelin-throwing, swordsmanship, agility and mere strength. It appeared to me not only shameful but incredible that a man who was capable of such complete adequacy in his proper station in life as Commodus had shown himself to be, for instance, when berating Satronius and Vedius or, still more, when facing the mutineers and dooming Perennis, should be willing to leave the management of the Republic and the ruling of the Empire to an ex-slave and ex-street porter like Cleander, and occupy his time with spearing bears, shooting with arrows lions, tigers, or elephants and what not, burying his sword-blade in bulls, even with clubbing ostriches.

I oscillated or vacillated between these two lines of thought. The sight of Commodus dodging the lightning rush of an infuriated ostrich and neatly despatching him with a single blow on the head from a palm-wood club no longer and no thicker than his own forearm not only stirred my wonder that any man could possess such accuracy of eyesight, such power of judging distances and time, such perfect coördination of his faculties of observation, of his will and of his muscles; but also roused my disgust that a man capable of ruling the world and with the opportunity to show his capabilities should degrade himself to wasting time on tricks of agility and feats of strength and skill.

On the other hand the sight of Commodus using a full-grown male Indian elephant as a target for his arrows enraged me. Next to a man an Indian elephant is the most intelligent creature existing on this earth of ours, as far as we know. An elephant lives far longer than a man. His life of useful labor is longer than the total life of a long-lived man. And his labor can be very useful to mankind. An elephant can travel, day after day, as fast and far as a horse, he can accomplish easily tasks to which no team of horses, not even of sixteen horses, is adequate, he can outdo any gang of men at loading or unloading a ship with massive timbers or with many other kinds of cargo in heavy and bulky units. It can only be a shame to kill, for mere sport, so noble a creature. It is bad enough to exhibit in the arena fights of elephants, which kill each other for our diversion, when we might utilize their courage and prowess in battle, as the Indians do. But to use an elephant as a mere target for arrows is far worse.

Then again, while I watched Commodus killing an elephant with his arrows I could not but think of the hundreds of men who had been employed in tracking his herd, building a stockade, driving into it what elephants they could, fettering them, taming them, caring for this one after he had been tamed, tending him on his journey of many thousand miles from India, across Gaddrosia, Carmania, Susiana, Mesopotamia and Syria to Antioch and from there to Rome; on getting food for him on his journey and at different cities; on the vast expense of all this; and for what? That a silly and vainglorious overgrown child should shoot him full of arrows till he bled to death!

I raged inwardly.

I quite agree that Commodus enjoyed killing for killing's sake; it gave him a sort of sense of triumph to behold any animal succumb to his weapons. But I think his sense of triumph was also far more for his repeated self-congratulation on his accuracy of aim for shot or blow, on the perfection of his really amazing dexterity.

When he shot at elephants the procedure was always the same; two elephants were turned into the arena, and Commodus was matched against some archer of superlative reputation, whose prowess had been repeatedly demonstrated before the audiences of the Colosseum, a Parthian, Scythian, or Mauretanian. A prize was offered to him if he won and wagers were laid, mostly of ten to one or more on Commodus; he, of course, betting on himself with at least one senator at any odds his taker chose. Then the contest began, Commodus shooting from the Imperial Pavilion, his competitor from any part of the podium which he might choose, so that both archers were on an equality, being placed on the coping of the arena at spots they had chosen. The prize went to whichever killed his elephant with the fewest arrows. Commodus always won. Not that his competitors did not do their best. They did. But he was, in fact, the best archer alive. His

accuracy of aim was uncanny and his strength really terrific. He could himself string a hundred and sixty pound bow and he shot a bow even stiffer than that without apparent effort and with fascinating and indescribable grace. He never missed, not only not the animal, but not even the vital part aimed at. I was told that, when he first practiced on an elephant, he killed it with arrows in the liver, of which eleven were required to finish the beast. He then had it cut open under Galen's supervision, he watching. He thereafter never failed to reach an elephant's heart with his third arrow, killed most with his second, and not a few with his first, a feat never equaled or approached by any other archer, for the killing of an elephant with five arrows by Tilla the Goth remains the best record ever made in the Colosseum by any other bowman. The impact of his arrows was so weighty that I have beheld one go entirely through the paunch of a full-grown male elephant and protrude a foot on the other side.

With rhinoceroses and hippopotami the procedure was similar. Neither of these animals could be had as plentifully as elephants, of which I saw Commodus and his competitors kill more than thirty; mostly Mauretanian elephants, but some Indian and a few Nubian. I saw killed for his amusements in similar contests in which he participated four rhinoceroses and six hippopotami. In these matches he killed one rhinoceros with two arrows and the rest with one; so of the hippopotami. As with the elephants, after he had seen a rhinoceros and a hippopotamus cut open under Galen's direction, he retained so vivid an impression of the location of its heart that, from any direction, whether the beast was moving or still, he sent his arrow so as to reach the heart. This sounds incredible, but it is exactly the truth.

As I watched I kept imagining the baking deserts of Libya or the steaming swamps of Nubia, the shouting hordes of negroes, the many killed by the beast, its capture, and the infinite and expensive care necessary to bring one alive to Rome.

Besides these enormous animals he practiced archery on the huge long-horned bulls from the forests of Dacia and Germany; on the bison from the same regions, beasts with heavy shoulders, low rumps and small horns, parallel to each other, curving downwards over the brows; on the big stags from these far-off forests, or any sort of stags! And on two varieties of African antelope not much inferior in size to stags or bulls. He very seldom needed a third arrow to put an end to any beast of these kinds, not often a second arrow, and, actually, killed hundreds, even thousands, neatly and infallibly with his first shot. All these animals he shot from the podium, often leaning on the coping, his right knee on it, generally standing, his feet wide apart, the toes of his right foot against the coping wall; for, as with sword or spear or club, he also shot left-handed.

From the arena itself, standing on the sand on which they scampered about, he shot multitudes of smaller animals: wild ponies, wild asses, striped African zebras, gazelles, and at least a dozen varieties of small African antelopes, for which there are no special names in Latin or even in Greek. The antelopes and gazelles, although they ran quicker than hares, he never missed and seldom did he fail to kill with one arrow whatever animal he aimed at. He never, to my knowledge, missed even the incredibly speedy wild asses.

Nor did he ever miss an ostrich, though he shot both from the podium and the sand these birds, which are swifter than even the wild asses. He shot at them with arrows made specially after a pattern of his own, with crescent-shaped heads set on the shaft with the two horns of the crescent pointing forward, the inner curve sharpened to a razor edge. Shooting at an ostrich racing at top speed he never failed to decapitate it with one shot, invariably severing its neck about a hands-breadth below its head.

He also killed with javelins or arrows wolves, hyenas, bears, lynxes, leopards, panthers, tigers and lions. But when killing such dangerous and ferocious animals he took his stand on a platform, the floor of which was about three yards square and elevated about that distance above the sand, constructed well out in the arena so that he could shoot down in any direction on beasts rushing towards or past the platform or driven past it or towards it. He slaughtered incredible multitudes of these creatures and certainly displayed amazing strength and skill, habitually killing a lion with one javelin, almost as often with one arrow, and the like for tigers; and oftener for panthers and leopards. He never needed a second arrow to finish a wolf or hyena or even a lynx. The marvellous accuracy of his aim, the way he planted his arrow unerringly in the heart of a galloping wolf scudding across the sand far from him; the way he drove a broad-bladed hunting-spear clear through a huge shaggy bear, never failed to rouse my wonder, even my admiration. [Footnote: See Note J.]

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXI RECOGNITION

I do not recall any special feat of the Imperial beast-killer during the summer and autumn of the year in which I had fooled Bulla and been transferred from the stud-farm to the Choragium, which was the year in which Crispinus and Aelian were consuls, the nine hundred and fortieth year of the City, [Footnote: 187 A.D.] and the eighth of the Principate of Commodus. But, when the season for spectacles in the arena opened with the first warm, fair weather of the following spring, he returned to his favorite sport with redoubled zest, amounting to a craze.

It was during the spring and early summer of this year that he began to make huge wagers with wealthy senators, betting that he could kill a specified number of a specified variety of animal with a specified number of spears or arrows; always proposing so to limit himself as to number of weapons that the exploit appeared impossible. The result was that avaricious Midases were eager to wager, as they felt certain of winning. Yet he never lost, not once.

And, after each wager made, or won, he made the next on a narrower margin at smaller odds, until he struck the whole nobility numb by offering to wager even money that he could kill one hundred full-grown male bears from his usual platform with one hundred hunting spears, covenanting that he was to lose if he needed one hundred and one spear-casts to lay out those hundred bears limp, flabby and utterly dead. This appeared so utterly an impossibility that Aufidius Fronto offered to put up two million sesterces against him. The pompous sham philosopher, who feigned the profoundest contempt for riches, could not resist what looked like enormous gains. He made the wager, and Commodus won.

Now I cannot insist too positively on the amazing, the incredible strength and skill and nerve required for this fatiguing and taxing feat. Any other man I ever knew or heard of would have shown evidences of weariness long before he had despatched his hundredth bear; would certainly have betrayed the terrific strain on his nerves. Commodus was, apparently, as fresh, as jaunty, as full of reserve strength, as far from being unsure of himself when he finished the hundredth bear as when he drove his first spear into the first.

Now it requires altogether exceptional strength so to cast even the best design of hunting-spear, as keen as possible, as to drive it through the matted pelt, thick hide and

big bones of a bear; in so driving it, to aim it so that it will pierce his heart calls for superhuman skill. And to reiterate this feat ninety-nine times in succession argues a perfection of eye, hand and nerve never possessed by any man save Commodus. Any other man would have felt the strain, most men would have become so anxious towards the end as to become agitated. He kept calm and cool.

I thoroughly enjoyed the discomfiture of Aufidius Fronto and relished his futile efforts to appear indifferent to his money loss.

Not many days later Commodus made a similar and still more hazardous wager with Didius Julianus, the most opulent and ostentatious of the senators, who was afterwards nominally Emperor for two months and five days. This wager covenanted that Commodus, from his platform in the arena, would despatch one hundred full-grown male lions, in their prime and vigorous, with one hundred javelins. On this arduous frivolity they wagered ten million sesterces and had the actual gold, fifty thousand big, broad, gold pieces, carried into the arena and piled up in a gleaming mound on a monster crimson rug for all to behold. This bit of ostentation was like Didius Julianus and not unnatural for Commodus. I have never seen any man perform so easily so difficult a feat. Killing a lion with three javelins requires very unusual strength and skill. To kill ten lions with forty casts would tax the muscles, dexterity and nerves of the best spearman the world ever knew. To kill a hundred lions with, barely one javelin apiece was bravado to propose and miraculous to accomplish. Accomplish it he did and without any visible effort or strain. Eighty-nine of the hundred he shot through the heart; the remaining eleven with difficult fancy shots which he was, against all reason, tempted to essay, and which, against all probability, uniformly were fully successful.

Didius Julianus paid his wager without any show of chagrin, as he could well afford to do.

At once Commodus offered to bet that he could kill a hundred similar lions with a bare hundred arrows. Didius at once wagered the same sum he had just lost and the bet was made. The exhibition was delayed more than a month until it had been possible to accumulate at Rome a full hundred full-grown male lions. Then Commodus again shot in sight of a pile of gold pieces on an expanse of crimson velvet spread on the sand of the arena.

Commodus won as before, with exactly the same number of heart shots and fancy shots. If one miracle can be greater than another this feat surpassed its predecessor. For a lion takes a great deal of killing before he dies, and each of these hundred lions died as quickly as any lion ever does. Instant killing of a lion with a javelin is a miracle, even

more miraculous is instant killing of a lion with one arrow. Commodus so killed the full hundred.

I know of no more astounding demonstration of his infallible and tremendous muscle power than the fact that, shooting at a lion fully twenty yards away, and in the act of rearing rampantly at the beginning of a bound, he sent his arrow into the roof of its mouth, through the brain, the entire length of the spinal cord and so far that its point protruded from the dead beast's rump above the root of its tail. Galen, who, as often, was in the amphitheater in case of injury to the Prince, and who was in the habit of dissecting such dead beasts as interested him, cut along the path followed by the missile, cleaving the dead lion in two lengthwise and laying the two halves hide downward on the sand, so as to demonstrate to a bevy of curious and awed spectators the incredible path of that arrow.

Commodus lived on miracles. Of all the thousands of darts, javelins and spears which I saw him throw, of all the countless arrows I saw him shoot, not one ever missed its mark, not one merely hit the beast aimed at, everyone, even if launched at an ostrich skimming the sand or a gazelle, struck deep and true precisely where he had aimed it.

As I am about to narrate the occurrence which put an end to the insensate indulgence in beast-killing in which Commodus had revelled, I am reminded that, besides his vilifiers, who assert that he publicly exhibited himself as an ordinary beast-fighter, and his apologists, who maintain that he not only did not do so, but never so much as drove a chariot in public or spilt human blood with an edged weapon, there are others who, while not retailing or inventing any fictions or attempting to blink or suppress any facts, yet inveigh against Commodus as absurdly assuming the attributes of Hercules while really a weakling and as pretending to powers which he never possessed, as having been largely or wholly a counterfeit spearman, a make-believe archer, a sham swordsman and a mock athlete.

Among other alleged proofs of these baseless contentions they cite the ecstatic joy with which, to the limit of the supply gathered from all parts of the African deserts, he day after day, on the sands of the arena, delightedly clubbed ostriches, alleging that killing an ostrich with a sword or club is child's play and no feat of skill. As to this particular citation of vaunted evidence, as in their contentions at large, they are egregiously mistaken and far from the facts and the truth.

Actually, for a lone man, on level ground, far from any shelter, an angry full-grown young male ostrich is a formidable assailant and a dangerous antagonist. No living creature that roves the surface of our earth moves faster than a healthy ostrich. When running it skims the arena, when attacking it darts. It kicks forward, raising its long and

powerful leg high in the air and bringing it down with a blow so swift that the eye cannot follow it and so forcible that I have seen one such stroke smash all together the collar-bone, shoulder-blade, upper arm-bone and half the ribs on that side of its unfortunate victim, a big, agile, vigorous Nubian, habituated to ostriches in their haunts. And, if the leg misses its mark, as it very seldom does, the bird, as it hurls past its enemy, pecks viciously at his face, its sturdy beak being capable of inflicting a serious wound wherever it strikes, and often destroying an eye, its usual target.

To stand alone, far out in the arena, bare-headed, clad only in a diaphanous silken tunic, armed only with a club no longer or thicker than his forearm; so habited and armed to await the assault of an infuriated bird so bulky, so swift, so agile and so powerful; to dodge jauntily, but infallibly, both the stroke of the leg and the stab of the beak, and invariably to bring his club down on the darting head and finish the bird neatly with that one blow; this was equally a feat of self-confidence, of dexterity, of agility and of strength. I hold no man justified in condemning Commodus because he gloried in clubbing ostriches.

The incident I recall occurred when spring had already waned and was merging into summer. The lower tiers of the Colosseum were well filled with senators, nobles and other persons of sufficient importance to be invited. None of the Vestals were present and their box was occupied by Marcia and her intimates. There were enough spectators seated to give the amphitheater an appearance of gaiety and vivacity almost as great as if it had been filled by all classes of the populace. The weather was clear, warm and sunny, with a light, soft breeze.

Commodus had exhibited his dexterity as an archer by shooting a great number and great variety of small antelopes, each one of which he had killed with a single arrow. Next he began clubbing ostriches and disposed of a dozen or more. Altogether there were about fifty. It was characteristic of Commodus that he was impatient of any delay between different exhibitions when he was thus displaying his prowess. After the ostriches he intended to mount his platform and shoot fifty or sixty lions. In order to have them handy to begin on as soon as the last ostrich was despatched he had commanded that those which were to be let out of posterns should be disposed behind the doors and that some of the cages of those which were to be liberated from cages should be hoisted from the crypt and set ready in the arena. A full dozen of such cages had been set out. I was not with the gang hoisting these cages and marshalling other lions behind posterns, but was at the opposite end of the arena with a smaller gang which was engaged in getting ready a score or more of tigers which were to be let out after the lions and which were giving a great deal of trouble.

Commodus was facing my end of the arena and so had his back to the lions in their cages, which were about thirty yards from him. The liberated ostriches did not seem to pay any attention to the caged lions and each, as he was driven back towards Commodus by men with long hayforks, with which they caught the birds' necks and held them off, turned furiously on Commodus and charged him viciously. Each bird Commodus dodged with one slight instantaneous and effortless movement; each bird fell dead at once, neatly clubbed on the head.

As he clubbed the last ostrich I saw a lion step dazedly and tentatively out of one of the cages. Of course, it was not intended that any of the lions should be liberated until the Emperor had mounted his platform, approved the bow selected for him or chosen one for himself, and similarly inspected and approved as many arrows as he expected to need. It was hardly possible that any cage-door came open by accident. I conjectured a plot similar to that which I had seen fail when the piebald horse threw himself and his fall and the wreck of the chariot he helped to draw failed to cause the death of Palus the Charioteer.

The lion, once he was wholly out of his cage, sneaked forward his length or more, crouched, and bounded towards Commodus. A shout of dismay, horror and warning went up from the audience. Marcia shrieked and leapt to her feet. Most of the spectators also stood up, the audience rising in a sort of wave as it emitted its yell of consternation.

Commodus whirled round, saw the lion, stood and eyed him precisely as if he had been a charging ostrich; appeared to measure the diminishing distance, showed no sign of perturbation, crouched slightly, dodged as the lion sprang at him; dodged so slightly that I was sure the lion had him, but so effectively that no claw touched him; straightened up as the lion, wholly in the air, shot past him; swung his short club and brought it down on the lion's neck; and stood there, triumphant, by a lion stretched out motionless on the sand, totally limp and unmistakably dead.

Marcia fainted.

So did half her guests.

So did some of the older senators.

Commodus, not so much as noticing the perturbation of his guests, not even Marcia, called out to the overseer in charge of the cages:
"Not a man of you dare move. Stand where you are."

The guards, a batch of whom were stationed at each postern by which the attendants entered and left the arena, ran towards the Emperor. He ordered them to summon all their fellows from all through the Colosseum and when their chief officer approached him gave orders that they form a cordon behind the cages and see to it that no man of those who had been getting out the cages should escape.

While this was being done the spectators had reseated themselves, the inanimate had been revived and even Marcia had recovered consciousness and composure and, with her guests was as before their fright.

When all were in order Commodus ordered:

"Let out another lion!"

The overseer in charge of the cages and the officer of the guards demurred.

"Do as I tell you!" Commodus browbeat the overseer. To the officer he said:

"If I, with only a tunic and club, am not afraid of a lion charging me, you and your men, in armor and with shields and swords ought not to be afraid." "We are not," the officer declared, "we are concerned for you, not for ourselves."

"Pooh!" said Commodus. "If I could kill the first handily when I was not expecting him, I can kill all the rest the same way when I know what is coming. A lion, by that sample, is as easy to dodge and club dead as an ostrich or easier. Send me another."

Another was let out amid the dead silence of the dazed and astounded spectators. Commodus killed the second as handily as the first.

Now I must say that no exploit recorded of any human being or traditional of any legendary hero, outclasses as a feat of strength, coolness, courage and perfect coordination of all the mental and physical faculties, this act of Commodus' in killing two successive lions with a palm-wood club. A charging lion is an object so terrifying as to chill the blood of a distant onlooker. Very unusually good nerves and very exceptional self- confidence are required to face with composure a portent which appears so irresistible. And when the lion emits his tremendous roar and rises, bodily, into the air in his mortal spring, mouth wide open, its crimson cavern glaring, teeth gleaming, eyes blazing, mane erect, paws spread, claws wide, the stoutest heart might well quail. Yet, after barely escaping one lion, this foolhardy coxcomb, this vainglorious madcap, joyously called for another and jauntily despatched him: whatever may be said against

Commodus as a man and an Emperor, as an athlete he believed in himself and justified his belief.

He called for a third, in spite of Marcia's shrieks, gesturing to her to sit down and keep still, and laughing up at her. But by this time Aemilius Laetus, who was afterwards the last Prefect of the Praetorium to Commodus and who was then an officer of the Guards, superior to the officer who had protested, approached, saluted and spoke to the Emperor. Their conference was conducted in tones too low to be overheard, but it was afterwards reported, both by those who claimed to learn of it from Commodus and by those who claimed to have been informed by Laetus, that he had urged upon the Emperor that his personal importance to the Republic was too great for him to risk himself so needlessly, and that Commodus had yielded to his expostulations.

At any rate Commodus ordered arrested and bound the entire gang who had been handling the lions' cages. He then walked up to them and enquired who had let out that lion. When no one confessed to having been responsible and several were accused by their fellows, the Emperor gave orders to lead off all concerned, hale them not before the Palace court, nor the commission in charge of prosecutions for offences against Imperial Majesty, but before the regular public magistrate in charge of trials for murder, assassination, poisoning, homicidal conspiracy and the like.

"Let him put the entire gang to the torture," the Emperor was reported as ordering. "Let him prosecute his enquiry until he gets a confession plainly naming the man who bribed the poor wretch who left that cage half- fastened, or the man who bribed the man who forced him to do it, or the whole chain of scoundrels, from the noble millionaire conspirators who hatched the idea, through their rabble of go-betweens down to the fool who hoccussed that door-snap."

After the prisoners were marched off Commodus had the herald apologize for the interruption of the entertainment, proclaim that it would now proceed and request everyone to remain to enjoy it. Then he mounted his platform.

Yet this was his last exhibition of himself in the role of beast-slayer. I conjecture that as the episode of the piebald horse enlightened him as to the facilities for unobtrusive assassination afforded his enemies by his public appearances as a charioteer, so this episode of the accidentally liberated lion awakened him to the ease with which it might be arranged, whenever he entered the arena as a beast-slayer, that some monster might be loosed at him rather than for him. At any rate he never again took his stand in the arena for his long idolized sport. Beast-slaying he thenceforth eschewed.

Of course it was not by any means at once that we in the Choragium realized that the Emperor had abandoned his vagary. We knew only that we were suddenly unemployed and were merely glad of the respite and then uneasy at the change. I had time to reflect how marvellous had been my luck. Commodus himself had three several times asked me questions about my ability to control beasts; Galen had many times stood by me or passed near me, often with his eyes apparently meeting mine. Satronius Satro had stood and gazed at me, not three yards away. A score of other senators, all of whom had known me in the days of my prosperity, had been as near me, and noblemen to the number of something like a hundred. Not one of these had identified me.

If I escaped recognition it was, I conjectured, because of the deep-seated habit of mind of noblemen and more exalted personages and of men, like Galen, who have risen to a station in life which places them on an equality with nobles; the habit of mind which makes them regard a slave not as a human being, to be looked at as an individual, as they look at an equal or any freeman, but as a mere object like a door, or gate or piece of statuary or of furniture or a sort of utensil. Such men look full at a slave, if unknown to them, without really perceiving him. From this cause, I conceive, I escaped recognition, detection, and annihilation.

Much less than a month after the episode of Commodus and the two lions I was reading in my quarters, when the slave detailed as my personal servant entered and, cringing, said that there was a gentleman who wanted to see me. I gazed at him severely and said:

"I think you are mistaken. Please remember what the procurator told you about persons desiring to intrude on me."

The fellow fairly cowered, visibly sweating and trembling, but insisted:

"I really think that you really will be glad to see this gentleman."

I perceived that some unusual enticement must have been offered the pitiful wretch to induce him to brave the terrors of the punishments with which the procurator had threatened him if he allowed any would-be visitors to reach me. It also appeared to me that the fellow was fond of me and had the best of intentions.

"Show the gentleman up," I finally said.

He had been gone but a very short time when the door opened and in came....

Tanno!

He shut the door fast and, without a word, we were clasped in a close embrace.

When our emotions quieted sufficiently I pressed Tanno into a chair and resumed mine. We gazed at each other some time before either mastered himself enough for words. Tanno spoke first, veiling his feelings beneath his habitual jocularly. He said:

"Caius, you are certainly unkillable or bear a charmed life. You have been officially certified as dead two several times. First you were butchered by the Praetorians at Ortona, then you were assassinated by a disgruntled public-slave in the Umbrian Mountains: after two demises here you are, as alive as possible. Please explain."

"I feel faint," I said, "and, illogically, both thirsty and hungry."

I signalled for my servitor and, almost at once, he brought plenty of the Choragium's more than passable wine, fresh bread and a variety of cold viands. A draught of wine and a mouthful of bread and ham made me feel myself. Then I told about my close shaves when I three several times barely escaped assassination at the hands of partizans of Bulla, about the kindness of the Villicus and procurator and why I had changed my name.

"Why didn't you send at least a tiny note to Vedia and let her know you were alive after all?" he queried.

"I have lain awake night after night," I replied, "composing letters to Vedia and to you, letters which would tell you what I wanted if, by good luck, they came into your hands, but which, if they fell into the hands of secret-service agents, would tell nothing and not so much as arouse enough suspicion to cause them to investigate me and take a look at me. I could not frame, to my satisfaction, even one such letter. I knew that any messenger I employed would most likely post off to some Imperial spy and show him my letter before he took it to its destination or instead of delivering it. I canvassed every possible messenger, from my personal servitor here in the Choragium, through all the slaves I knew here or in the Colosseum who are free to run about the city, up to every sort of street-gamin, idler, loafer, sycophant and what not. I could not think of any kind of messenger who would be safe, nor of any letter which would not be dangerous. Much as I wanted to apprise Vedia of my survival I could not but feel that any attempt on my part to communicate with her or with you would lead straight to betrayal, detection, recognition and the death from which Agathemer saved me."

"I believe you were right," Tanno agreed. "It has all come out for the best. You are alive and unsuspected and I have found you."

"How did you find me?" I queried.

"Galen," he said, to my astonishment, "told me that you were sheltered in the Choragium, cloaked under the style and title of Festus the Beast- Tamer. He said he recognized you last fall, but did not judge it wise to give me or Vedia so much as a hint as long as you were busy in the arena in full view of all Rome on festival days and under the eyes of our entire nobility during our Prince's exhibitions of himself as Hercules Delirans. When Commodus abruptly realized that beast-killing might not suit his health because of the opportunities it gave for accidentally letting lions or tigers or what not out of their cages at unexpected moments, since he was not likely to revert to his renounced sport and you were not likely to be so much in demand and therefore less likely to be much under observation, Galen thought it safe to tell me. He says he has always believed that you had nothing to do with Egnatius Capito's conspiracy, had merely been seen by some secret-service agent while talking to Capito, never were a member of his conspiracy, never conspired against Commodus, never were disloyal, have never been and are not any danger to our Prince, and therefore are a man to be shielded rather than informed on. So he kept his face when he recognized you in the arena masquerading as Festus and kept his counsel till he judged the time ripe to tell me.

"I at once told Vedia, in person and privately. She is overjoyed, and, just as her encounter with you on the Flaminian Road not only stopped her proposed marriage to Orensus Pacullus, but made her feel she never wanted to hear of him again, so your resurrection and reappearance now has spoiled an apparently prosperous wooing of her by Flavius Clemens, who is as good a fellow as lives; noble, rich, handsome, charming and just such a suitor as Vedia might and should have married if you were really dead, and one she could not, in any case, help flirting with. She must have admiration, attention and admirers. With all her love of gaiety she loves you unalterably."

"I infer," I said, "that she told you of our encounter on the Flaminian Way."

"She did," he answered, "and gave me a full report of your story of your adventures from Plosurnia's Tavern till she saw you. As soon as we conferred we both started to use all our influence and any amount of cash necessary (we both have cash to spare, hoards of it) to arrange for your legal manumission by the fiscus, your disappearance, and your comfort in some secure shelter until it might be safe for you to reappear as yourself in your proper station in society.

"We found we should have no difficulty in arranging for your manumission. It has already been favorably reported on the recommendation of the authorities of Nuceria. We had only to slip a small bribe or two to expedite matters. But when we sent off a

dependable agent, armed with all the necessary papers, to set you free from your captivity on the Imperial estate, and provide you with plenty of cash to make everything smooth for your disappearance, he was confronted with a most circumstantial story of your assassination and burial, with the official reports of both and the affirmation of an upper inspector who had investigated the matter.

"We could not but think you dead in fact and Vedia was as heartbroken as five years ago, if not more so, for the glamour of that romantic encounter with you was magical. I believed you dead and was astounded when Galen gave me his information. Vedia is as amazed as I."

After some mutual desultory chat he fell to questioning me about my adventures and, drinking and eating when the humor took us, we spent most of the day together, I rehearsing for him all that I had told Vedia and much more in detail and also telling of all which had befallen me since then.

When Tanno left, it was as late as he could possibly remain and yet reach the Baths of Titus in time for the briefest bath there.

Next day he came again.

By this time both he and I had had time to think over the situation and to arrive at definite conclusions as to what was best to do. I was delighted to find that his ideas and mine agreed as to all essentials.

When he first came in he said:

"I had mighty little sleep last night. I could hardly close my eyes for thinking over your marvellous adventures. The more I ponder over them the more wonderful they seem; especially your involvement with Maternus; your encounter with Pescennius Niger; your presence in the Circus Maximus when Commodus:—I mean Palus:—drove his car over the axles of the stalled chariots and escaped between them out of the smash and wreckage; your involvement with the mutineers, and your safety in Rome all these months, even in the arena of the amphitheater. I congratulate you."

Then he told me his plan which he had already talked over with Vedia and which she approved. There happened to be in Rome a distinguished and wealthy provincial of senatorial rank, about to leave for Africa, where his estates were situated and where he owned vast properties near Carthage, Hippo Regius, Hadrumetum, Lambaesis and Thysdrus, in all of which places he had residences of palatial proportions and luxury. He had been making enquiries among his acquaintances for a slave much of the sort

Agathemer had been to me. He had not found one to suit him. Tanno thought that I would suit him and could easily pass myself off as the sort of man he wanted. Then I would get out of Rome unsuspected and be comfortable and well treated in the most Italian of all our out-provinces, in a delightful climate, amid abundance of all the good things of life.

I agreed with him.

Then he disclosed his plan for bringing this about. By influence or bribing or both he would arrange to have me sold out of the Choragium, ostensibly as now superfluous there, and to have me bought from the fiscus by a dependable and close-mouthed go-between buyer, who would agree to hold me for quick resale to a purchaser designated by Tanno. Thus Nonius Libo, the wealthy provincial who was to be induced to purchase me, would know nothing of my identity with Festus the Animal Tamer or of my connection with the Choragium.

I acclaimed this project, as far more promising than Vedia's plan to seclude me in the dreary wilds of Bruttium.

Tanno gave me a letter and went off. I found the missive a long and loving letter from Vedia: one to soothe and transport any lover.

Tanno had said that he would not visit me again except as was absolutely needful, considering it reckless and venturesome to run the risk of some Imperial spy noticing his visits to the Choragium and making investigations. Though he remarked that no man in Rome seemed less likely than he to be suspected of disloyalty, intrigue or of being a danger to the Prince.

Within a very few days he paid me one more visit to inform me that everything had gone well, that all necessary arrangements had been made for my sale by the fiscus out of the Choragium, and all necessary preparations made to take full advantage of it.

A few days later I was formally sold for cash to a provincial slave-dealer, named Olynthides. In a slave-barrack which he had hired for the month only I found myself with a motley crew, but kept apart from them and comfortably lodged, well fed and considerably treated, as valuable merchandise.

The day after Olynthides had bought me Nonius Libo came to inspect me. He talked to me in Latin and in Greek, commended my fluency and polish in the use of both, had me write out a letter in each at his dictation, read both and commended my accuracy, script and speed; questioned me about the history of music, painting, and sculpture and as to

my opinions on the works of various sculptors, painters, architects and composers; asked about my tastes along these lines and as to jewelry, fine furniture, tapestries, carpets and the like; also as to my personal tastes concerning lodging, bathing, hunting, food and clothing and was I a good sailor and fond of the sea; and stated that I suited him.

I was not present at his chaffering with Olynthides but, after no long interval I was summoned into the courtyard and Olynthides handed me over to Nonius Libo, along with a bill of sale.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXII PHORBAS

Olynthides had said to me:

"I make it a point always to forget the names of the slaves I buy for cash without any guarantees and resell the same way. I have as bad a memory for names as any man alive and I help my bad memory to be as much worse as I can. I'll forget your name in a few days. I am not sure I remember it now. What is it?"

I was ready for him, for I had made up my mind to change my name again and had selected my new name.

"Phorbas" I answered.

"Oh, yes!" he ruminated, "Phorbas, to be sure. I should have said Florus or Foslius or something like that. Phorbas! I'll remember Phorbas till after you are sold and the cash in my hands and you and your new master out of sight. Then I'll forget that too, like all the rest."

As Phorbas, Phorbas the Art Connoisseur, I began my life with Nonius. He was domiciled in a palace of a residence on the Carinae, which he had leased for the short term of his proposed stay in Rome. There I was lodged in a really magnificent apartment, with a private bath, a luxurious bedroom, a smaller bedroom for the slave detailed to wait on me, a tiny triclinium and a jewel of a sitting-room, gorgeous with statuettes and paintings, crammed with objects of art and walled with a virtuoso's selection of the best books of the best possible materials and workmanship.

There I spent some happy days. Nonius had told me I might go out all I pleased. I had replied that I preferred to remain indoors until we set out for Carthage. He smiled, nodded and said:

"I understand: do as you like."

I passed my time most agreeably, except for several intrusions by Libo's wife, Rufia Clatenna. She was a tall, raw-boned, lean woman, with unmanageable hair which would not stay crimped, a hatchet face, too much nose and too little chin, a stringy neck, very large, red, knucky hands and big flat feet. She had a mania for economy and close

bargains, seemed to regard her husband as an easy mark for swindlers and to be certain that he had been cheated when he bought me. She thought herself an art-expert, whereas she had no sound knowledge of any branch of art, no memory for what she had heard and seen, and no taste whatever. To demonstrate that her husband had made a bad bargain when he bought me she bored me with endless questions concerning the contents of her domicile, of which she understood almost nothing, and concerning famous composers, painters, sculptors and architects, as to whom she confused the few names, dates and works she thought she knew about.

Nonius came on us in his atrium while she was putting me through a questionnaire on every statue, painting and carving in it. The first time he saw me alone he said, smiling:

"You mustn't mind her; I put up with her, you can, too."

When he came into my apartment and told me he meant to set off from Rome next day, I ventured to express my puzzlement that he had bought me and never mentioned to me, since I came into his possession, any of the subjects on which he had questioned me and for knowledge of which he had, presumably, wanted me.

"Oh," he said, "I didn't buy you for myself. I know very little about art and music and am no connoisseur at all. I bought you for my cousin Pomponius Falco. He is as much interested in such matters as any man in Africa. He is richer than I and you'll find him the best possible master. He'll be at Carthage when we get there and I'll resell you to him soon after we land."

Nonius and Clatenna had no children, but doted on her sister's son, a lad of not much over twenty, lean as his aunt, but small boned and not unshapely. He was not, however, handsome, for he had a pasty, grayish complexion, thin lank hair, almost no beard, and a long nose suggesting a proboscis. His name was Rufius Libo, and he was Nonius Libo's heir. In his favor Nonius made a will a few days before we left Rome, leaving him his entire estate except a jointure to Clatenna, endowments to some municipal institutions in his home towns, legacies to various friends and manumission to faithful slaves. Of this will he had several duplicates made and properly witnessed and sealed. One of these he left on deposit in Rome; another he despatched to Carthage by a special messenger by way of Rhegium, Messina, the length of Sicily to Lilybaeum and thence by sea to Carthage; and he gave one each to Clatenna and to Rufius.

When he gave orders for the despatch of the copy of his will by the special messenger I was astonished, as I assumed that we were to travel by the same route. But I found that he meant to sail all the way from the Tiberside water-front of Rome to Carthage. This amazed me. And not unnaturally. For we Romans generally dislike or even abhor the sea

and sail it as little as possible, making our journeys as much as we can by land and as little as may be by water, choosing any detour by land which will shorten what crossings of the sea cannot be avoided.

Among the few Romans whom I have known who enjoy sea voyages I count myself. Of all of them Nonius outclassed the rest. He worshiped the water and was happiest when afloat and well out to sea. He told me that he had spent more money on his private yacht than on any of his residences, and, when I saw her, I believed him. A larger, better designed, better equipped, better manned, better supplied, better appointed private yacht I never beheld. His rowers kept perfect time and made top speed all down the Tiber, her crew set sail like man-of-war men, her officers were pattern seamen and got the very most speed on their way from every condition of wind and weather. Rufius and Clatenna, while not as good sailors as Nonius and I, were notably good sailors and we had a very pleasant voyage until we were almost in sight of Carthage. Then we encountered a really terrific storm.

Now I am not going into any details of our disaster. I do not know whether all writers of memoirs get shipwrecked or all survivors of shipwrecks write reminiscences, but I am certain that of all the countless memoirs I have read in the course of my life, ninety-nine out of every hundred contained one or more accounts of shipwrecks, narrated with the minutest detail and dwelling on the horrors, agonies, miseries, fears, discomforts and uncertainties of the survivors and narrators with every circumstance calculated to harrow up their readers' feelings. I could write a similar meticulous narrative of my only shipwreck, and it was sufficiently uncomfortable, terrifying, ghastly and hideous to glut a reader as greedy of horrors as could be, but I am going to pass over it as lightly as possible and summarize it as briefly as I may.

Suffice it to set down here that we were not driven on any rock or reef or shoal nor did we collide with any other ship. Laboring heavily in the open sea, straining on the crests and wallowing in the troughs of the stupendous billows, the yacht, even as carefully built a yacht as Libo's, began to leak appallingly, the inrush of the water surpassed the utmost capacity of the pumps and the most frantic efforts of the men at them; the vessel settled lower and lower, labored more and more heavily and was manifestly about to founder.

The officers were capable men, the small boats sturdy and their crews and steersmen skillful and confident. Clatenna was brave and Libo magnificent. He kept his head, dominated his officers, and insisted that Rufius and I should embark in a different boat from that to which he and Clatenna trusted themselves. He personally saw to it that Clatenna and Rufius had, on their persons, each their copy of his will.

Both boats were successfully launched, and, as we drew away from the doomed ship, we saw a third and fourth put off with other valued members of his household. While a fifth and sixth were being swung overboard we saw, from the top of a huge swell, the yacht go under and vanish; saw, when we next rose on the chine of a billow, the water dotted with spars, wreckage and swimmers; saw, five or six times more, the three other boats: and then many times, high on a vast wave, beheld only the waste of lifeless waters, without boat or swimmer.

All night we floated and, not long after sunrise, we were seen and rescued by a trading ship from Carales in Sardinia, bound for Carthage.

At Carthage we were soon in the palace formerly Libo's and now the property of Rufius. He, on succeeding to his uncle's estate, at once rewarded with a huge donation the steersman of the boat in which we had been saved, saying that the other steersmen did their best, but that, if the others had been as dexterous as he, his aunt and uncle would not have perished by so deplorable and so untimely a death.

Within a few days he, now my owner by inheritance, sold me to Pomponius Falco, as Nonius had intended to do himself.

Falco liked me at first sight and I him. He was a man between thirty-five and forty years of age, a natural born bachelor and art connoisseur. He was of medium height, of stout build, with curly black hair and a curly black beard, a swarthy complexion, a bullet head, a bull neck, a huge chest and plump arms and legs. He was by no means unhandsome in appearance and very jovial, good-humored, and good-natured; manifestly fond of all the good things of life and able to discriminate and appreciate the best.

For several days after I came into his possession I was his dearest toy. He spent most of his waking hours conversing with me about music and musicians, poetry and poets, literature and authors, paintings and painters, statuary and sculptors, architecture and architects, gems, ivories, embroideries, textiles, furniture, pottery and even autographs and autograph collecting. He seemed to appraise me an expert on all such lines and to be well pleased with his purchase.

Certainly I was as well clothed, fed, lodged and attended as if I had been his twin-brother.

Before he had owned me many days Falco said to me:

"Phorbas, I've been puzzling about you. You are a slave and you were sold to poor Libo and by Rufius to me as a Greek. Yet you have none of the appearance nor behavior of a

Greek nor yet of a slave. You look and act and talk like a freeman born and a full-blooded Roman, and a noble at that. Please explain."

Now, of course, in imagining all the forms in which I might be assaulted by the perils which beset me, I had foreseen just such a query as this utterance of Falco's involved and I had pondered and rehearsed my answer. I realized that I must be ready with a reply wholly plausible because entirely consonant with the facts of our social life, as they existed, so that no one could take any exception to it. I thought I had framed such a reply.

"You know how it is," I answered easily. "A Roman master buys a young and comely Greek handmaid. In due course she has a daughter, legally also a slave and nominally a Greek, yet half Roman. When she is grown, if she happens to be comely and the property of a master like most masters, she has a daughter, a slave and spoken of as a Greek, yet only a quarter Greek. If she has a similar daughter, that daughter, a slave and called a Greek, is only one-eighth Greek. I conceive, from all I know, that my great grandmother, grandmother and mother were such slave women. I, a slave and ostensibly a Greek, am fifteen-sixteenths Roman noble, by ancestry, according to my reckoning. No wonder my descent shows in my bearing, manner and conversation."

This answer was, actually, not so far from the facts, my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother had, certainly, been Roman noblewomen, daughters indeed, each of one of the oldest and longest-lineaged houses of our nobility; and, like my father, grandfather and great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather had been a Roman nobleman. But his father, my great-great-great-grandfather, had been a freed-man, manumitted in the days of Nero, acquiring great wealth, attaining equestrian rank during the last years of Nero's reign, and vastly enriched during the confusion of the civil wars, marrying a young and wealthy widow after Vespasian was firmly established at Rome by the crushing of the insurrection of Claudius Civilis.

Probably the general consonance of my answer with the facts made my utterance of it more convincing. Certainly it appealed to Falco.

"Just about what I conjectured," he said, smiling. "And will you tell me in what part of Italy and on what estate you were born and how you came by your air of aristocratic culture and by your marvellous dilettantism?"

"I know what I know and am what I am," I replied, "because I was, from childhood, treated just as if a son instead of a slave; pampered, indulged and made much of. That lasted till I was more than full-grown.

"The misfortunes of the family to which I belonged came so suddenly that I was not manumitted, as I should have been had my master had so much as a day's warning of his downfall. I was sold to a fool and a brute, as you have probably inferred from my back. The marks of his barbarity which I bear, and my lasting grief for the calamity of the household in which I was born, make me unwilling to tell you anything of my past previous to my purchase from Olynthides by Nonius Libo."

"Well," he said, "your feeling is natural and I shall not urge my curiosity on you. I mean to indulge you and even pamper you; mean to endeavor to indulge you and pamper you so you will feel more indulged and pampered than ever in your life, I'll make a new will, at once, leaving you your freedom and a handsome property. I expect to live out a long life, all my kin have been healthy and long-lived. But one can never be certain of living and I mean to run no risks of your having any more troubles. You deserve ease and comfort. And you shall have them if I can arrange it. I love you like a born brother and mean to treat you as well as if you were my twin."

The year in which Commodus killed the two lions, each with one blow of his trifling-looking little palm-wood club, in which year I was sold out of the Choragium, and purchased by Nonius, in which I crossed the sea, was wrecked and saved and resold to Falco, was the nine hundred and forty- first year of the City [Footnote: 188 A.D.] and the ninth of the reign of Commodus, the year in which the consuls were Allius Fuscianus and Duillius Silanus, each for the second time. In Africa, with Falco, I spent that and the following year very comfortably and happily, for I was as well clothed, fed, lodged and tended as Falco himself. I liked him, even loved him, and I felt perfectly safe.

The climate of Africa agreed with me, and I liked the fare, especially the many kinds of fruit which we seldom see in Rome and then not in their best condition, and some of which we never see in Italy at all. I admired the scenery, and I delighted in the cities, not only Carthage and Utica, but both Hippo Regius and Hippo Diarrhytus, and also Hadrumetum, Tacape, Cirta and Theveste, and even such mere towns as Lambaesis and Thysdrus, which last has an amphitheater second only to the Colosseum itself. They all had fine amphitheaters, magnificent circuses, gorgeous theaters and sumptuous public hot baths. Not one but had a fine library, a creditable public picture-gallery, and many noble groups of statuary, with countless fine statues adorning the public buildings, streets and parks. The society of all these places was delightfully cultured, easy and unaffected. I revelled in it and could not have been happier except that I never heard from Vedia or Tanno, let alone had a letter from either. And I wrote to both and sent off letter after letter to one or the other. For it seemed to me that a letter in this form could not excite any suspicion.

"Phorbas gives greeting to Opsitius, and informs him that after he had been sold by Olynthides to Nonius Libo, he survived the sinking of his owner's yacht and was sold by Libo's heir to Pomponius Falco, in whose retinue he now is. Farewell."

I sent off, at least once a season, a letter like this to both Tanno and Vedia. No word from either ever reached me. I could but conjecture that all my letters had miscarried.

Meanwhile, besides being reminded of it each time I wrote to Tanno or Vedia, I did not forget that I was a proscribed fugitive, my life forfeit if I were detected. I conceived that my best disguise was to dress, act and talk as much as possible in the character of dilettante art expert and music-lover, which I had assumed. Falco treated me, as he had prophesied, almost as a brother. I had a luxurious apartment in each of his town residences and country villas, and a retinue of servants: valet, bath- attendant, room-keeper, masseur, reader, messenger, runner and a litter with three shifts of powerful bearers. Everything Falco could think of in the way of clothing, furniture and art objects was showered on me and my slightest hint of a wish was quickly gratified. Also Falco supplied me a lavish allowance of cash. Therefore I could gratify any whim. Besides, my amulet-bag was intact and had in it all the gems which Agathemer had originally placed there, except only the emerald Bulla had sold for me.

I thought up everything I could do to make myself look completely a Greek virtuoso and as un-Roman-looking as possible. I patronized every complexion-specialist, friseur, perukier, manicurist and fashionable barber in that part of the world. I bought every hair tonic for sale in the colony. Between lotions and expert manipulation I succeeded in growing a thick curly beard, covering my chest as far as the lower end of my breast-bone and a thick head of hair so long that, even when elaborately frizzed and curled, my oiled and scented locks fell as far down my back as my beard spread on my bosom. Nothing could have made me look more Corinthian and less Roman.

I wore the gaudiest clothing I could find; tunics and cloaks of pure silk and of the brightest or most effeminate hues; crimson, emerald-green, peacock-green, grass-green, apple-green, sea-green, sapphire-blue, sky- blue, turquoise-blue, saffron, orange, amethystine, violet and any and every unusual tint; boots of glazed kidskin or of dull finish soft skin, of hues like my silk garments, always with the edges of the soles heavily gilded. And, for my shoes as well as for my garments, I chose particolored materials with the most startling or languorous combinations of unusual dyes. All my boots and shoes were embroidered in silver thread or gold thread, all my outer garments embroidered in crimson, deep green, deep blue, gold or silver, in big, striking, conspicuous patterns. I had elephants, lions, antelopes, horses, cattle, sheep, stags, goats, storks, cranes, even fish embroidered on my outer garments amid trees, vines, and flowers; roses, lilies,

violets, poppies and others uncountable. I spent on such gewgaws a considerable part of my allowance, yet never exhausted Falco's lavish provision for me.

I also went in for jewelry, loading my fingers with flashy rings, wearing bracelets on both wrists, two or three on each, always two necklaces and even earrings, for which I had my ears pierced, like a Lydian.

When I coned myself in my dressing-room mirror, arrayed in such a superfluity of decorations and fripperies, I felt sure that no one would take me for a Roman.

In these apparently natural vanities and vagaries Falco humored me, enquiring of his friends concerning friseurs of acclaimed reputation, buying me any gaudy fabrics he saw, also presenting me with caskets of necklaces, amulets, bracelets, finger-rings and earrings. He rallied me on my oriental tastes, but aided me to gratify them.

He even came to feel his interest in jewelry and gems enhanced by my fad for them. He took to purchasing antiques in jewelry and rare and unusual gems and his hoard grew into a notable collection.

By the end of my second winter with Falco I had come to know intimately all his town and country palaces and all his dilettanti friends and had enjoyed to the full the many delights of the colony, not only its climate and fruits, its scenery and cities, its statuary and pictures, its libraries and public-baths, but its excellent performances of tragedies and comedies, and its spectacles creditable, not only as to chariot-racing but also as to beast-fights and exhibitions of gladiators. I found life in Africa extremely agreeable and looked forward to any length of it with contentment.

I may remark that during this time Cleander came to the end of his period of unlimited wealth, power and misrule. I was thus out of Rome at the time of his downfall and death and while the Praetorium had a score of Prefects in rapid succession.

In the spring of the nine hundred and forty-third year of the city,
[Footnote: A.D. 190.] and the eleventh of the reign of Commodus, the year in which he was nominally consul for the sixth time, along with Petronius Septimianus, Falco startled me, while we were dining alone together, as Agathemer and I had used to dine together, by saying:

"Phorbas, you talk of Rome differently from any other man I ever heard talk of it. I have meditated over the quality of what you say of Rome, but I cannot analyze it or describe it accurately. Yet I may say that others talk of Rome as holy ground, but you alone make me feel that the soil inside the Pomoerium is holy ground: others talk of the grandeur of Rome; you make me realize its grandeur: others prate of their love for Rome: you,

saying little, make me tingle with a subtly communicated sense of how you love Rome: others babble of how life away from Rome is not life, but merely existence; of how any dwelling out of Rome is exile, of how they long for Rome; you, by some sorcery, make me not only feel how you long for Rome, but have awakened in me a longing for Rome. I have never been out of this colony of Africa, not even into Mauretania. A man as rich as I and of equestrian rank can afford to travel, to visit all the interesting parts of the Empire, to live where he likes, anywhere in Italy or even in Rome.

"I have never wanted to leave this colony: I love every bit of it and especially my residences and estates. I have been satisfied here. When my friends argued with me and tried to persuade me to travel and especially to visit Rome, I never was convinced by their arguments. I have a dread of sea-voyaging, a dread accentuated by the death of poor Libo. who was an enthusiastic voyager and had a yacht as staunch and a crew as capable as skill could produce, money buy and judgment collect. Yet he perished. I did not need the warning of his fate to keep me ashore. Then again, I prefer to be a big frog in a small pond to being a small frog in a big pond, I am one of the most important men in this colony and, here in Africa, I am always somebody. In Rome I should be nobody.

"Yet, without my realizing it and later against my will, your conversation, in some subtle way, has so infected me with the desire to see Rome that I am going to brave the terrors of the seas, am going to sink myself into insignificance among the scores of richer and more influential men who cluster about Caesar. I am even going to put at the mercy of the sea my precious collection of gems, which I now value more than you and myself together and twice over.

"I have made all my arrangements. I have put my affairs in order, made sure that my estates will be properly managed in my absence, bought the best yacht to be had in the harbor of Carthage, and that is saying a great deal for its excellence, and I have ordered coffers in which to pack my beloved gems.

"Prepare to accompany me; within ten days we set off for Rome."

I knew Falco. Easy-going as he was, when he had taken a notion to buy and indulge a connoisseur-slave, collect gems or visit Rome, opposition, arguments, artfulness or stratagems were alike useless. I resigned myself to my fate.

I meditated over this fifth fulfillment of the prophecy of the Aemilian Sibyl.

Since I had been with Falco and practically a free and rich man, I had made handsome sacrifices at Mercury's Temples in all the cities we visited which had temples to Mercury. The morning after Falco announced his intentions to go to Rome I went out alone and

unattended; myself, in the market place of Carthage, bought two white hens; myself carried them to the Temple of Mercury and myself had them offered to the god.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXIII IMPOSTURE

We had no bad weather on our voyage to Rome nor any adventure. The day before we sailed I had conned my image in the mirror in my dressing-room and had comforted myself with the decision that no human creature could conceivably suspect of being a Roman this full-bearded, longhaired, long-nailed, frizzed, curled, oiled, perfumed, gaudy, tawdry, bedizened, bejeweled, powdered, rouged, painted popinjay.

I laid in an extra supply of nail-polish, nail-tint, rouge, face-paint, blackening for painting eyebrows and eyelashes, and of perfumery, cosmetics, unguents and such like. If I were sufficiently whitened, reddened, rouged, and painted I hoped I should be well enough disguised to face Gratillus or even Flavius Clemens without a qualm. Actually my bizarre and fantastic appearance was an almost complete protection to me.

And I needed protection. For Falco was related to many prominent families and men in Rome; for instance, he was a cousin of Senator Sosius Falco, who was consul two years later. He was introduced widely and at once and invited everywhere. I was constantly in attendance on him.

My experiences during my long stay at Rome with Falco were, in truth, amazing. He bought a fine palace on the Esquiline, near the Baths of Titus, furnished it lavishly, entertained magnificently and revelled in the life of Rome. At first I was busy showing him the chief sights of the City, then the minor sights, then coaching him in the niceties of social usages, then conveying him on the round of all notable sculptures, picture galleries, private collections of pictures or statuary, famous museums, repositories of all kinds of art objects and, especially, the gem collections, both private and public, particularly the large exhibit in the temple of Venus Genetrix, placed there by the Divine Julius, and the smaller exhibit in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, donated by Octavia's son, Marcellus.

Later he divided his time between giving dinners and going out to dinners and haunting the houses of gem collectors and the shops of jewelers.

He began visiting jewelers' shops, to be sure, within a few days of our arrival in Rome. We had not been there ten days, in fact, when he made me conduct him to the Porticus Margaritaria, on the Via Sacra, near the great Forum, which was and is the focus of pearl dealers and gem dealers in general in Rome.

There we entered several shops and, at last, I could not keep him out of that of Orontides, who had known me perfectly. His was unique among shops in Rome and probably was the largest and most splendid jewelry shop in all the world: more like a small temple of Hercules or a temple-treasury than a shop. It was not in the Pearl-Dealers' Arcade, where only small, square, usual shops were possible, but adjacent to it and entered from the Via Sacra. It was circular, with a door of cast bronze, beautifully ornamented with reliefs of pearl-divers, tritons, nereids and other marine subjects. Inside its dome-shaped roof was lined with an intricate mosaic of bits of glass as brilliant as rubies, emeralds and sapphires, or as gold and silver. The roof rested on a circular entablature with a very ornate cornice, under which was a frieze ornamented with reliefs, representing winged cupids working as gem-cutters and polishers, as chasers of salvers and goblets, and as goldsmiths and silversmiths. The architrave was as ornate as the cornice. The entablature was supported by eight Ionic columns of the slenderest and most delicate type, of dark yellow Numidian marble, while the lining of the wall-spaces was of the lighter yellow Mauretanian marble. Of the eight wall-spaces one was occupied by the doorway, over which was a bronze group representing a combat of two centaurs. On either side of the door was a wall-space ennobled by a niche with a life-size, bronze statue, one of Orontides' father, the other of his grandfather, both of whom had been distinguished gem-dealers at Antioch. Two more wall-spaces were occupied by ample windows, not of open lattices, but glazed with almost crystalline glass set in bronze, a form of window seldom seen except in great temples, the Imperial Palace, and the residences of the most opulent senators and noblemen.

The three wall-spaces behind the counter were filled from column to column with tiers of superposed recesses, in size like the urn niches of a burial columbarium, but each closed with a door of cornel-wood carved and polished, behind which doors Orontides kept his precious merchandise.

The counter divided the shop across from window to window. It had in the middle a narrow wicket through which Orontides and his assistants could crawl in and out. Otherwise the outer face of the counter was of two blocks of Numidian marble, carved in patterns of twining vines; its top was of one long slab of the exquisitely delicate white marble from Luna. On it lay always squares of velvet, in color dark blue, black, dark green, and crimson, on which were admirably displayed his goldsmith work and jewelries.

Below the panels about each statued niche was a curved seat of Numidian marble amply large for four persons at once, so that eight prospective customers could sit and wait while as many stood at the counter; and, according to my recollection of the shop in the

days of my prosperity, a shop crowded with customers was the rule rather than the exception with Orontides.

It was crowded when we entered. I, endeavoring to conserve a natural demeanor, felt my sight blur. I saw, as we entered, only a row of backs of customers standing at the counter: three in noblemen's togas, one in the toga of a senator, their fulldress boots conspicuously red beneath their robes; four in the silken garments of wealthy ladies, all in pale soft hues of exquisite Coan dyes.

Of these eight backs two, one of the lady midway of the counter, the other of her escort, appeared terrifyingly familiar.

In fact, when we entered I had three distinct shocks in quick succession. Flashy, painted and rouged as I was I dreaded Orontides' eyes. There he was behind his counter, visible through a rift in the press of handsomely dressed customers of both sexes.

Instinctively I glanced at the only other interval in the line of absorbed opulent backs.

Through it I recognized Agathemer smiling at me!

I saw that he, at least, recognized me at once and my dread of Orontides intensified tenfold. I knew Agathemer would be discreet, loyal and trusty. I dreaded to lose countenance if I kept my eyes on his face and I looked elsewhere.

I recognized the back of Flavius Clemens!

If he turned round I felt I was lost. Yet I could not flee. Falco was certain to linger in the shop. I must keep my self-control and prepare to brazen out anything.

The next instant I recognized the back of the lady next Flavius Clemens.

Vedia!

As I recognized her she turned, saw me, knew me through my disguise, flushed, and turned back.

I should not have been surprised if she had fainted and crumpled up on the white and brown mosaic floor in front of the counter. She kept her feet and her outward self-possession.

Clemens spoke to her in an undertone.

"No," she answered him, in a choked voice, "I have changed my mind. I won't take these."

She was handling an unsurpassable necklace of big pearls.

He whispered to her.

"No," she said, curtly. "I won't look at any others. I think I'll go home."

He was so amazed that he never saw me or, I think, anything or anybody else in that shop just then. He escorted her out.

When I regained my self-possession enough to feel that I appeared at ease and could trust myself to glance at the other customers as I should have done had I been in fact what I was trying to appear, I was relieved to find that not one of them was more than distantly known to me.

The idlers on the benches showed no inclination to rise and approach the counter. Falco and I occupied the interval vacated by Clemens and Vedia. Agathemer, of all men on earth, asked what he could do for us. Falco stood there a long time, saw a goodly fraction of the finest jewels in Orontides' possession and, manifestly, made as favorable impression of connoisseurship on Agathemer as Agathemer made on him. They eyed each other as fellow-adepts. Falco asked that he reserve an antique Babylonian seal cut in sardonyx and promised to send a messenger with its price before dark. Agathemer, who was passing under the name of Eucleides, blandly replied that Orontides would prefer to send the seal to Falco's residence. Falco agreed, of course, and to my unutterable relief we finally departed.

Agathemer—Eucleides—brought the seal; and timed his arrival neatly as Falco returned from the Baths of Titus just before dinner time. He was giving a big formal dinner and my dinner was to be served in my apartment, which had a tiny triclinium; being as lavishly appointed, and one in which I was as luxuriously lodged and served, as those I had had in Carthage and Utica.

I asked Agathemer if he could stay and dine with me and he accepted. We had a wonderful dinner. The food, of course, was unsurpassable and our appetites keyed up by our mutual emotions. When the dessert and wine were brought in I dismissed the waiters, made sure that no man or boy of my retinue was in my apartment and bolted its door.

Then we fell into each other's arms.

After we had expressed our mutual affection I told him my story from the morning after the massacre and he told me his, which was commonplace.

He had easily escaped from the slave-convoy between Narnia and Interamnina, had made his way to Ameria and found shelter there with slaves as an ordinary runaway slave. After a discreet interval he had travelled to Rome. There he had found old acquaintances to protect and shield him. I was presumed to be dead and any fellow-slave would help him in his situation, he being presumed to be legally a slave of the fiscus. He had no difficulty in disposing of a gem out of his amulet-bag and then rented lodgings, passed as a freedman, by the name of Eucleides, and gradually made himself known to various gem-experts who gave him as much protection as had his fellow-slaves, his former acquaintances. Orontides perfectly knew who he was, yet engaged him as an assistant by the name of Eucleides and as being a freedman. Ever since then he had lived safe in his lodgings, and spent his days at Orontides' shop or about Rome at gem-dealers. He declared that he was, if possible, more of a gem-expert than before our adventures began, which was saying a great deal.

He laughed heartily and often at my disguise, acclaimed it a work of art in every detail and in its total effect and vowed that he believed that I could spend years in Rome in Falco's retinue and encounter all my old acquaintances and be in little danger from any and in no danger except from such professional physiognomists as Galen and Gratillus.

I told him of what Galen had said to Tanno. Agathemer said he had had only two interviews with Tanno, at which they had deplored my death, I having been believed to have perished with Nonius Libo. They had also agreed to avoid each other, for fear of attracting the notice of some secret-service agent or volunteer spy. Tanno had not mentioned Galen.

We agreed that we, also, must avoid each other and not meet oftener than say four times a year, for fear of leading to my detection.

He told me of Marcia's unlimited power over Commodus, the whole Palace and the entire social and governmental world of Rome. He also said that he was convinced that Ducconius Furfur was domiciled in the Palace and that Commodus used him as dummy ceremonial Emperor, when he himself was masquerading as Palus, the Gladiator, for he was now developing for public exhibitions of his swordsmanship a mania as insensate as those he had had for charioteering and beast-fighting.

Next day, naturally, I had a visit from Tanno, who even sacrificed his afternoon bath and came to see me while Falco was at the Baths of Titus.

He embraced me heartily, when we were alone, and talked with his habitual mask of jocularly.

"Three times dead, Caius," he said, "and still alive and fit. Dying seems to agree with you, whether it is military execution, rural assassination, or drowning at sea. I am still incredulous that you are really alive; we had the most circumstantial accounts of the loss of poor Libo's yacht with all on board."

"That is odd," I said, "Rufius Libo survived and succeeded to his uncle's property."

"I knew he inherited all Nonius left," Tanno stated, "but I had no idea that Nonius had Rufius with him here in Rome and that he was on the yacht; I thought he was in Carthage all the while. Certainly every account we had specified that no one was rescued from that yacht."

I told him that Rufius had promised me to write him of my survival and that I had despatched at least a score of letters to him and as many to Vedia. He was as puzzled as I that not one had reached either of them.

I gave him an account of my life since he had seen me and he approved of my disguise as much as had Agathemer and laughed at it even more heartily.

He said:

"Poor Flavius Clemens is in a daze. He cannot conjecture what has gone wrong with his wooing again a second time. He behaved very tactfully after his first rebuff ensuing on Galen's tip to me and mine to Vedia. He was so cautious about not thrusting himself on Vedia that their acquaintance, quite naturally, warmed again gradually into mutual interest and romantic affection and was ripening into love when the sight of you yesterday annihilated his excellent chances of marrying her. He was just about to buy for her a two-million-sesterce pearl necklace. If she had accepted the gift it would have been tantamount to a public pledge to marry him. Poor fellow!"

When he left he gave me a letter from Vedia, a letter as loving as a lover could wish for. She declared that she would not marry Flavius Clemens nor anybody except me and would wait for me as long as might be necessary or stay unmarried until the end of her days, if, by any misfortune, the end came to her before she and I were free to marry.

She said that we must avoid each other as much as possible and that I must not spoil my chances of safety either by relying too recklessly on my disguise or through risking arousing suspicion in Falco by any attempt at confining myself to my apartment, which would have been altogether incongruous with the character I had assumed.

The rest of that year and all the winter I passed living the normal life of an indulged and pampered favorite of an opulent bachelor dilettante noble. It was a life almost as enjoyable as the life of a wealthy nobleman to which I had been born and brought up.

I had but one anxiety and that was not small and it steadily increased. It was caused by a progressive alteration and deterioration in the character of my master. In all other respects he remained the man he had been when he first bought me, but as a gem-fancier his hobby became a passion which deepened into a mania and colored, or discolored, all he did. He had, as he always had had, a very large surplus of income over and above what was needful to maintain his huge estates in Africa, his many luxurious villas and town-palaces there, his yacht and his palaces in Italy at Baiae and at Rome. The normal accumulation of this surplus had taxed his sagacity as an investor, for it was always harder for him to find advantageous investments for his redundant cash than to find cash for tempting investments. Certainly his excess income more than sufficed for any reasonable indulgence in gem-collecting.

Yet his outlay for rare gems ran up to and outran and far outran his resources. The strange result was that he, who had huge revenues from estates and safe investments, desired a still greater income. He began to embark in risky ventures which promised large and quick returns. He went into partnership with two different nobles, who made a practice of bidding on the taxes of frontier provinces exposed to enemy raids. Bidders were shy of investing their cash in the problematical returns of such regions and those who had the hardihood to enter into contracts with the government made huge profits if lucky. Falco was lucky each time. He plunged again and again.

He also embarked similarly in bidding for unpromising contracts and in buying up estates thrown unexpectedly on the market. All his ventures turned out successfully, he gained great resources for indulging his fad for gems and rare curios, his collection grew and became one of the most famous private collections in Rome.

Also his mania for speculation grew as fast as his mania for collecting gems.

This led to my exposure to the oddest and most alarming peril which I had run since Agathemer and I crawled through the drain-pipe at Villa Andivia; greater I think, than the risk I ran when I nearly encountered Gratillus at Placentia. This happened about

eleven months after I came to Rome with Falco, in the spring of the year when Pedo Apronianus and Valerius Bradua were consuls.

This occurrence and the circumstances which led up to it I cannot forbear narrating, but I shall not go into details, for it involves at least allusion to behavior not at all creditable to my owner and I am unwilling to disparage or seem to disparage one who was to me a dear friend and a generous benefactor. The truth is that his passion for gem-collecting had not only undermined his character but had, in a way, sapped the foundations of his native uprightness. If he had remained the man he was when he bought me he would not have been capable of entertaining, let alone of acting on, the considerations which actuated him.

He thought he saw a chance to make vast profits quickly with no risks. But to achieve this he needed the presence and the countenance of another wealthy nobleman of the African province, who, like him when he purchased me, had never been in Rome or, indeed, out of the colony. The name of this man, whom I had met while in Thysdrus, was Salsonius Salinator. His wealth, inherited by his father and grandfather from a long line of wealthy ancestors, came from many vast salt works along the coast, which, by the custom of the province, remained private property and merely paid the government a lease-tax or rent. The family had been, many generations before, named from these works and was very proud of its names.

Now Falco had so far progressed with his negotiations that the other parties to the proposed bargain were unwilling to close the deal and sign a contract with Falco and his associates unless Salsonius Salinator, in person, appeared to make some necessary statements, and were willing and eager to sign and seal, the projected agreement if he did appear in person and did make those required statements. I am averse to smirching Falco's memory by going more minutely into detail.

Now Salinator had written Falco that he was coming to Rome and later, when he received a letter from Falco outlining the pending negotiations and their object, he had written promising to be in Rome by a specified date. He was most enthusiastic as to Falco's project and thought as well of it as did Falco. Falco told his associates of Salinator's letter and promise and they adjusted their outstanding investments so as to be able to close the contract as soon as Salinator appeared.

He did not appear on the date specified. Naturally Falco was perturbed, his associates vexed and the men with whom they were dealing increasingly restive. They threatened to break off the negotiations and close a contract with other bidders. Falco begged for an extension of the time and they grudgingly granted it. Still no signs of or word from Salinator. The negotiations appeared likely to fall through.

In his distress Falco conceived and set about putting into practice a scheme such as he would never have thought of or entertained if he had been the man he was when he bought me. When he was himself he had been the reverse of dishonorable. He came to me and said:

"We are at the end of our tether, Pullanius and his gang will break off negotiations tomorrow if I can't get hold of Salinator. I have no hope of his arrival, he may have not yet sailed from Carthage; he may have changed his mind about coming at all. I am not willing to lose so brilliant a chance. I have thought of just what to do.

"You would look like a Roman if you had your beard trimmed and your hair cut and all that powder and paint and rouge washed off your face: I took you for a full-blooded Roman when I first set eyes on you. What is more you would look so utterly unlike what you look like in your fantastic fripperies that no one would even suspect you of being the same man. Anyhow, Pullanius and his crowd have never set eyes on you, not one of them.

"All you have to do is to have your beard cut to about the fashionable length and your hair trimmed to conform similarly with current fashions for Roman noblemen and get into full-dress shoes, a nobleman's tunic and toga, and you'll pass anywhere for a genuine, free-born, full-blooded Roman.

"I'll take you to Pullanius tomorrow and introduce you as Salsonius Salinator. I'll coach you carefully as to how to behave and what to say. You are clever enough to assume the natural Roman demeanor to a nicety: also to rise to any unexpected situations and act and talk precisely as would Salinator himself.

"It will be sharp practice, in a sense. But I know Salinator would say all I want him to say, all Pullanius requires him to say, and more, if he were actually here. He is as keen on closing this contract as I am. So I am not asking you to be a party to an actual fraud. You will only be bringing about what would come about without you if something unforeseen had not prevented Salinator from getting here in time."

Now I had often differed with Falco, argued with him, opposed him, refused requests of his, and he had acquiesced and had acted as if I were not his property, but a free man and his complete social equal. But this was a situation wholly different from any I had encountered before. When it came to gem-collecting or to anything which gave him or would give him or was expected to yield him surplus cash for buying more gems for his collection, Falco was a monomaniac. I dared not refuse, or oppose him or argue or show any hesitation. A master can change in a twinkling from an indulgent friend to an

infuriated despot. In spite of the laws passed by Hadrian and his successors limiting the authority of masters over their slaves and giving slaves certain rights before magistrates, in practice an angry master can go to any length to coerce a recalcitrant slave. I saw not only privations, discomforts, hunger, confinement and chains threatening me, but scourging and torture.

I acquiesced.

Now I am not going into any details as to what I did and said to induce Pullanius and his associates to execute the desired contract. I acted the part of Salinator to perfection and my imposture succeeded completely.

But the negotiations dragged, for all that, and I had to impersonate Salsonius Salinator not only before Pullanius and his partners but generally all over Rome: had to submit to being shown the sights in my character of a provincial magnate in Rome for the first time; had to allow myself to be dragged to morning receptions of senators and wealthy noblemen and introduced to them; had to accept invitations to dinners given by noblemen and senators; even had to attend a public morning reception in the Audience Hall of the Palace. That I escaped undetected was more than miraculous; I could not believe it myself. But I did escape.

I escaped unsuspected the ordeal of being haled to a morning reception of Vedius Vedianus and presented to him as Salsonius Salinator of Carthage, Nepte and Putea. I should have been lost had he had at his elbow to jog his memory if he forgot a visitor's name the slave he had had in that capacity seven years before, since that alert nomenclator would have recognized me at once. But he had died of the plague and his successor had never set eyes on me. Vedius himself would certainly have known me for my true self but for his inveterate selfishness, and self-absorption and his incapacity for being diverted from whatever thought or idea happened to be uppermost in his narrow mind. He was, for some reason, eager to be done with his reception and had no eyes for any visitors except those from whom he expected immediate and positive advantage to himself. I escaped, but I went out sweating and limp with excitement.

I was even more faint and weak after having to attend a Palace levee. Fortunately Commodus had wearied of his father's methods of holding receptions and had reverted to the regulations in vogue under Trajan and Hadrian, according to which only such senators as were summoned approached the throne and were personally greeted by the Prince; the rest of the senators and all the lesser noblemen merely passed before the Emperor as he stood in front of the throne, passing four abreast along the main pavement at the foot of the steps of the dais and saluting him as they passed. Amid this crush of mediocrities I passed unnoticed, unremarked, unscathed.

But I marvelled at my luck, for I knew many eyes of secret-service experts scanned that slow-moving column of togaed noblemen and such adepts have a marvellous memory for the shape of an ear, a nose, a chin, or any such feature. After my hair and beard had been trimmed to suit Falco's notions and my face was innocent of powder, rouge and paint and I was habited in a tunic and toga with stripes of the width belonging to Salinator's rank and dress-boots of the cut and color proper for him I conned my reflection in the mirror in my dressing-room and was certain that anyone who had known me as myself must recognize me at first glance.

My two worst ordeals came when I went out with Falco to my second and fourth formal dinner in Rome in my character of provincial magnate. I went with him, altogether, to eight different dinners at the houses of capitalists associated with or supposed to have influence with Pullanius. Not once, in any of these eight perilous expeditions, did it occur to Falco to inform me beforehand where I was to dine. And I thought it best not to ask him, since I reflected that his complete ignorance of my past was an important factor in my chances of continued concealment and safety; and since I felt that some word, tone or look of mine might put him on the road to suspecting the truth about me. Therefore I set out to each of these eight dinners totally ignorant of our destination.

The first time I knew I was to dine with Appellasiu Clavviger, a Syrian capitalist who had been in Rome not much longer than Falco himself. Judge of my feelings when, in the mellow light which bathes Rome just after the sun has set from a clear sky and before day has begun to fade, I perceived that my litter-bearers, following Falco's, were turning into the street where I had lived before my ruin! Imagine my sensations when we halted before the palatial dwelling which had been my uncle's abode and mine! I was even more perturbed and overwhelmed by my emotions when on entering behind Falco I found nothing changed, scarcely anything altered from what had been there on the fatal morning on which, without any premonition of disaster, I had set off to the Palace levee and had, on my way, been saved by Vedia's intervention and letter. The appointments of the vestibule, of the porter's lodge, were as I had known them in my uncle's lifetime. So were the furnishings of the atrium and tablinum. Scarcely a statue had been added or so much as moved, most of the pictures being where my uncle had had them hung. Appellasiu, a fat, jovial, jolly man, did not see my confusion. We were the last guests to arrive and he was hungry. We passed at once into the triclinium. There also the wall-decorations were precisely as I had last seen them; but the square table and three square sofas had vanished and, in their place, was a new C-shaped sofa and a circular table covered with a magnificent embroidered cloth. In the course of the dinner, the company, as was natural with vulgarians newly enriched, fell to talking of their residences, of their size, convenience, and cost. I took the opportunity to compliment

Appellasius on his abode and, as he warmed to the subject, I inquired whether he had inherited it or bought it.

"Neither," said he. "I have merely leased it, and leased it furnished. It belongs to the fiscus; it was confiscated some years ago when its owner was proscribed for joining in one of the conspiracies against, the Emperor. It is a pearl. I am told that the father of its last owner was an art connoisseur. Anyhow I could not improve on its decorations or furnishings. I have made few changes, chiefly installing this up-to-date dining-outfit. The fittings of this room were all of one hundred years old, very fine in material and ornamentation, but unbearably inconvenient."

I had learned all I hoped for or dared attempt, and for the rest of the entertainment I kept to subjects as far as possible from anything likely to compromise me.

My second and far my severest ordeal was when a few evenings later I was dazed to realize that my litter, behind Falco's, was halting before the well-known residence of that booby, Faltonius Bambilio. But I was not afraid of him. I rated him such a dolt, such an ass, that even if he exclaimed that I was the image of Andivius Hedulio I had no doubt I could convince him that I was what I pretended to be and could even expunge from his mind any recollections of his having noticed such a striking resemblance. In fact he did not make any remark on my appearance or seem to have any inkling that he had ever seen me before, but accepted me as an interesting stranger.

I dreaded what guests he might have and the actuality surpassed my capacities to forecast possibilities.

I found the middle sofa at his table, for he adhered to the old-fashioned furnishings for a triclinium, occupied by his wife, Nemestronia and Vedia! Vedia, after one tense moment of incredulous numb staring, regained her composure.

Evidently she had not confided in anyone the fact of my survival and existence. For, if she had, she would have taken dear old Nemestronia into her confidence, since she was as able to keep a secret as any woman who ever lived and had loved me as if I had been her own and only grandson. For Nemestronia manifestly had believed me dead. At sight of me she was as thunderstruck as if she had seen an indubitable specter. She was smitten dumb and rigid and her discomposure was remarked by all present. But she recovered herself in time, passed off her agitation as having been due to one of her sudden attacks of pain in the chest. After that she did as much as Vedia to dispel any tendency to suspicions which she might have aroused. She was plainly, to my eyes, overjoyed at the sight of me in the flesh.

I have branded on my memory for life the picture I saw as I entered the triclinium. Its wall decorations expressed old Bambilio's enthusiasm for Alexandrian art and literature. The ceiling was adorned with a copy of Apellides' Dance of the Loves; and the walls were decorated with copies of equally celebrated paintings by masters of similar fame. The wall niches were filled with statues of the Alexandrian poets, the two opposite the entrance door with those of Euphorion and Philetas, the brilliant hues of the paint on them depicting garments as gaudy as I myself had been wearing a few days before. From the pink faces of the bedizened poets their jeweled eyes sparkled as if they were chuckling at the situation. Under the mellow light shed by the numerous hanging lamps, against the intricate particolored patterns of the wall between the statue-niches, I saw the vacuous baby face of Asellia, Bambilio's pretty doll of a wife, between Vedia's countenance cleverly assuming a normal social expression after her brief glare at me, and Nemestronia's mask of horror, accentuated by the agony of the gripping spasm which throttled her, for the pain in her chest was induced by anything which startled her, and was not assumed.

Once we were composed on the sofas the dinner passed off almost comfortably. For Nemestronia played her part in my behalf fully as well as did Vedia, who conversed with me easily, her demeanor precisely as if I had been Salsonius Salinator, a stranger whom she had just met, our talk mostly about Carthage, salt-works, the lagoons of the edge of the desert, date palms, local fruits, gazelles and such like topics, Nemestronia seconding her with questions about temple libraries, the cult of Isis in Hippo, and such matters. I became almost gay, I was enjoying myself.

The enjoyment, toward the close of the banquet, was marred by Bambilio, who, inevitably, had told Falco of his capture by brigands on the Flaminian Highway and, after his tale was told at great length, insisted on Vedia telling hers.

Worst of all, when she came to her night in her travelling carriage, alone (as of course all supposed) and surrounded by escaped beasts, hyenas, leopards, panthers, tigers and lions, Bambilio must needs remark:

"I'll wager you wished that the ghost of your old lover, Hedulio, had come to your assistance. He could wrestle with leopards; perhaps even his ghost might be able to control wild beasts."

"Perhaps," Vedia rejoined, unruffled, "maybe he was there to help me and maybe that was why I never felt really afraid that any beast would burst into my coach and seize me, though several snuffed at its panels and I could see them plain in the clear moonlight. Perhaps, in spirit, he was close to me to keep off the ravenous beasts and to strengthen my heart."

After she also had ended her story Bambilio eyed me:

"Did you ever hear a story excel hers and mine, Salsonius?" he queried.

"Never," I admitted, my gaze full on his.

The booby showed not a gleam of suspicion!

Inwardly I could not but remark that whereas I despised and loathed Bambilio for his pomposity and self-esteem, he made and kept friends. Plainly both Nemestronia and Vedia liked him, esteemed him and respected him.

After we left, I felt positively exhilarated at having had an evening in Vedia's company and having talked with her. Her escort, fortunately for me, had not been Flavius Clemens but young Duillius Silanus, son of the consul, who had never met me before.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXIV PALUS THE INCOMPARABLE

Within a very few days after my encounter with Vedia at Bambilio's dinner Falco and I had just ascended the stair of his residence after returning from a conference with Pullanius and his partners at which both sides had finally agreed on terms to the last detail and the contracts had been drawn up, executed, signed and sealed. He said:

"Phorbas, I am pleased with you. Such imposture as I have enticed you into cannot have been palatable to a man of your character. You have manifestly disrelished it, but you have valiantly stomached it for my sake. Actually you may be comforted, for it has not really been dishonest or dishonorable; you have only acted and spoken vicariously for Salinator: to a certainty he would have done and said just what you have, had he been present in person.

"You are a wonderful actor. No Greek or part Greek or half Greek or quarter Greek or thirty-second Greek I ever knew or heard of, clever as Greeks are at histrionics, could so perfectly act a Roman noble in every detail of demeanor, manner and word: down to the most trifling expression of every prejudice inherent in a Roman born. I admire you. Also I thank you.

"And I am as relieved as you will be to be able to tell you that your masquerade is at an end, successful and unsuspected.

"Now the important thing is for Salsonius Salinator to vanish from Rome at once.

"I suppose you have the wigs and false-beards you said you would buy or have made?"

"They are in my dressing-room," I replied.

"Then," he continued, "have yourself waked early, have your valet paint you and powder you and rouge you and fit you out with a wig like the head of hair you had before I made you impersonate Salinator, and with a false beard no one will suspect; have him rig you up in your favorite attire and load you with jewelry, then set off in my travelling-carriage for Baiae. Be out of Rome by sunrise. Travel straight to Baiae as rapidly as you find practicable without fatiguing yourself. At Baiae you will have the Villa and servants all to yourself. Stay there until you have grown your hair and beard as it was before your masquerade. Then return to Rome as Phorbas."

He paused, gazed at me and added:

"And I mean to make a new will. Besides leaving you your freedom and the legacy specified in my last will I mean to leave you my gem-collection and a full fourth of all my other estate. You deserve a lavish reward and I believe I love you better than any living human being."

I thanked him with my best imitation of the manner of a Greek, but with genuine feeling and from a full heart.

Actually I was glad to get out of Rome, glad to linger at Baiae. I made my time as long as I could and resisted several importunities from Falco before I finally returned to the city more than a year after I had left it. Thus I was out of Rome during the great fire, which destroyed, along with the Temple and Altar of Peace, the Temples of the Divine Julius and the Divine Augustus, the Temple of Vesta, the Atrium of Vesta and most of the other buildings about the great Forum, also the Porticus Margaritaria and the shop of Orontides. Strangely enough, when, at Baiae, I read letters from Falco, Tanno and Agathemer describing the devastation, my mind dwelt more on the annihilation of the shop where I had encountered Vedia than on the destruction of the Palace records and most of the public records, or of the many revered temples which had vanished in the flames.

When I returned to Rome the ruins were already largely cleared, and rebuilding, especially of the Temple of Vesta, was vigorously under way.

In Falco's household and manner of life I found few changes, except that Falco, really in excellent health, had become concerned about his trifling ailments, and, after trying one and another physician, had enrolled himself among the patients of the most distinguished exponent of the healing arts. Galen therefore, was a frequent visitor at my home and I saw him not infrequently. When I had some minor discomfort, Falco, always pampering me, called Galen in and enrolled me also among his charges.

After my return to the City the chief topic of conversation among persons of all grades of society and the pivot, so to speak, on which the spectacles of the amphitheater revolved was Palus the Gladiator.

I may set down here that I, personally, am now, as I was when I saw him appear as a charioteer for the last time, certain that Palus was Commodus in person. And I set this down as a fact. It will be seen later that I had more opportunity than any man in Rome, outside of the Palace, to know the facts.

Many people then believed and not a few still maintain that Palus was merely a crony of Commodus. Some whispered that he was a half-brother of Commodus, a son of Faustina and a favorite gladiator, brought up by the connivance of her too-indulgent husband; which wild tale suits neither with Faustina's actual deportment, as contrasted with the lies told of her by her detractors, nor with the character of Aurelius. Others even hinted that Palus was a half-brother of Commodus on the other side, off-spring of Aurelius and a concubine. This invention consorts still worse with the nature of Aurelius, who was one of the most uxorious of men and by nature monogamic and austere, almost ascetic. Some contented themselves with conjecturing that Palus accidentally resembled Commodus, which was not so far from the truth.

For I knew Ducconius Furfur from our boyhood and I solemnly assert that Palus was Commodus and that, whenever Palus appeared in the circus and, later, in the amphitheater, while the Imperial Pavilion was filled by the Imperial retinue, with the throne occupied apparently by the Emperor, the throne was occupied by a dummy emperor, Ducconius Furfur, in the Imperial attire, and Commodus was in the arena as Palus. Anyone who chooses may, from this pronouncement, set me down as a credulous ninny, if it suits his notions.

When Palus drove a chariot in the circus he never appeared with his face fully exposed, but invariably wore over its upper portion the half-mask of gauze, which is designed to protect a charioteer's eyes from dust and flying grains of sand. Similarly, when Palus entered the arena as a gladiator he never fought in any of those equipments in which gladiators appear bareheaded or with faces exposed: as a retiarius, for instance. He always fought as a secutor or murmillo, or in the armor proper to a Samnite, Thracian, or heavy-armed Greek or Gaul; all of which equipments include a heavy helmet with a vizor. Palus always fought with his vizor down.

It seems to me that the plain inference from these facts corroborates my opinions concerning Palus: certainly it strengthens my belief in my views. And these facts were and are known to be facts by all who, as spectators in the circus or in the amphitheater, beheld Palus as charioteer or as gladiator.

As a gladiator he was more than marvellous, he was miraculous. I was present at all his public appearances from the time of my return from Baiae. Also I had seen him closer, from the senatorial boxes in the amphitheater, three several times during my impersonation of Salsonius Salinator. Moreover I had seen him as a gladiator not a few times before that, since Falco, soon after we came to Rome from Africa, because of his affection for me and his tendency to indulge me in every imaginable way and to arrange for me every conceivable pleasure, had contrived to use the influence of some new-

found friends to make possible my presence at shows in the Colosseum, and that in as good a seat as was accessible to any free-born Roman not a noble or senator.

The very first time I saw Palus in the arena I felt sure he was Commodus in person, for he had to a marvel every one of his characteristics of height, build, outline, agility, grace, quickness and deftness and all his tricks of attitude and movement. The two were too identical to be anything except the very same man.

It will occur to any reader of these memoirs that Palus was a left-handed fighter, and that Commodus not only fought left-handed, but wrote, by preference, with his left hand and with it more easily, rapidly and legibly than with his right. But I do not lay much stress on this for about one gladiator in fifty fights left-handed, so that the fact that Palus was left-handed, while it accords with my views, does not, in my opinion, help to prove them.

What, to my mind, much more tends to confirm my views, is the well-known fact that Palus was always equipped with armor and weapons more magnificent and more expensive than any ever seen on other gladiators. Everything he used or wore was of gold or heavily gilt; even his spear heads and sword blades were brilliantly gilded; so were his helmets, shields, bucklers, corselets, breastplates, the scales of his kilt-straps when he fought as a Greek, and his greaves, whether of Greek pattern or of some other fashion. If he appeared in an armament calling for arm-rings, leg-rings, or leg-wrappings, these were always also heavily gilt. So was his footgear, whether he wore thigh-boots, full-boots, half-boots, soldiers' brogues, half-sandals or sandals. His shoulder-guards (called "wigs" in the slang of the prize-ring) were, apparently, of pure cloth of gold, which also appeared to be the material of his aprons when his accoutrements did not include a kilt.

Now it may be said that this merely indicates that his equipment was the most extravagant instance of the manner in which opulent enthusiasts lavished their cash on the outfitting of their favorites in the arena. To me it seems too prodigal for the profusion of any or all of such spendthrifts: it appears to me more like the self-indulgence of the vainglorious master of the world. Palus often wore a helmet so bejeweled that its cost would have overtaxed the wealth of Didius Julianus.

I consider that my opinions are corroborated by the well-known fact that whenever Palus appeared as a gladiator in the amphitheater, Galen was present in the arena as chief of the surgeons always at hand to dress the wounds of victors or of vanquished men who had won the approbation or favor of the spectators or of the Imperial party. True, Galen was often there when Palus was not in the arena, for he was always on the watch for anatomical knowledge to be had from observation of dying men badly

wounded. But, on the other hand, while he was often in the arena when Palus was not there, he was never absent when Palus was fighting.

Similarly, after Aemilius Laetus was appointed Prefect of the Palace, he was always present in person in the arena whenever Palus appeared in it. This, too, makes for my contentions.

The first fight in which I saw Palus revealed to me, and brought home to me with great force, the reason for his nickname, its origin and its astonishing appropriateness. The word "palus" has a number of very different meanings: manifestly its fitness as a pet name for the most perfect swordsman ever seen in any arena came from its use to denote the paling of a palisade, or any stake or post. Palus, in a fight, always appeared to stand still: metaphorically he might be said to seem as immobile as the post upon which beginners in the gladiatorial art practice their first attempts at strokes, cuts, thrusts and lunges. So little did he impress beholders as mobile, so emphatically did he impress them as stationary, that he might almost as well have been an upright stake, planted permanently deep in the sand.

I first saw him fight as a secutor, matched against a retiarius. This kind of combat is, surely, the most popular of all the many varieties of gladiatorial fights; and justly, for such fights are by far the most exciting to watch and their incidents perpetually varied, novel and unpredictable. It is exciting because the retiarius, nude except for one small shoulder-guard and a scanty apron, appears to have no chance whatever against the secutor with his big vizored helmet, his complete body-armor, his kilt of lapped leather straps plated with polished metal scales, his greaves or leg-rings or boots and his full-length, curved shield and Spanish sword. The secutor, always the bigger man and fully armed and armored, appears invincible against the little manikin of a retiarius skipping about bareheaded and almost naked and armed only with his trident, a fisherman's three-tined spear, with a light handle and short prongs, his little dagger and his cord net, which, when spread, is indeed large enough to entangle any man, but which he carries crumpled up to an inconspicuous bunch of rope no bigger than his head.

Yet the fact is the reverse of the appearance. No one not reckless or drunk ever bet even money on an ordinary secutor. The odds on the retiarius are customarily between five to three and two to one. And most secutors manifestly feel their disadvantage. As the two men face each other and the lanista gives the signal anyone can see, usually, that the retiarius is confident of victory and the secutor wary and cautious or even afraid. Dreading the certain cast of the almost unescapable net, the secutor keeps always on the move, and continually alters the direction and speed and manner of his movement, taking one short step and two long, then three short and one long, breaking into a dogtrot, slowing to a snail's-pace, leaping, twisting, curving, zigzagging, ducking and in

every way attempting to make it impossible for the retiarius to foretell from the movement he watches what the next movement will be.

Palus behaved unlike any other secutor ever seen in the arena. He availed himself of none of the usual devices, which lanistae taught with such care, in the invention of which they gloried and in which they drilled their pupils unceasingly. He merely stood still and watched his adversary. The cunning cast of the deadly net he avoided by a very slight movement of his head or body or both. No retiarius ever netted him, yet the net seldom missed him more than half a hand's breadth. When the disappointed retiarius skipped back to the length of his net-cord and retrieved his net by means of it, Palus let him gather it up, never dashed at him, but merely stepped sedately towards him. If the retiarius ran away, Palus followed, but never in haste, always at a slow, even walk. No matter how often his adversary cast his net at him, Palus never altered his demeanor. The upshot was always the same. The spectators began to jeer at the baffled retiarius, he became flustered, he ventured a bit too near his immobile opponent, Palus made an almost imperceptible movement and the retiarius fell, mortally wounded.

I was never close enough to Palus to see clearly the details of his lunges, thrusts and strokes. I saw him best when I was a spectator in the Colosseum while impersonating Salsonius Salinator, for in my guise as colonial magnate I sat well forward. Even then I was not close enough to him to descry the finer points of his incomparable swordsmanship. Yet what I saw makes me regard as fairly adequate the current praises of him emanating from those wealthy enthusiasts who were reckoned the best judges of such matters. By the reports I heard they said that Palus never cut a throat, he merely nicked it, but the tiny nick invariably and accurately severed the carotid artery, jugular vein or windpipe.

I can testify, from my own observation, to his having displayed comparable skill in an equally effective stab in a different part of his adversary's body. As is well known, a deep slash of the midthigh, inside, causes death nearly as quickly as a cut throat; if the femoral artery is divided the blood pours out of the victim almost as from an inverted pail, a horrible cascade. Most of the acclaimed gladiators use often this deadly stroke against the inside midthigh, slashing it to the bone, leaving a long, deep, gaping wound. Palus never slashed an adversary's thigh; in killing by a thigh wound he always delivered a lunge which left a small puncture, but invariably also left the femoral artery completely severed, so that the life-blood gushed out in a jet astonishingly violent, the victim collapsing and dying very quickly. Such a parade requires altogether transcendent powers of accuracy from eye and hand.

Besides fighting as a secutor against a retiarius Palus in the same accoutrements fought with men similarly equipped, or accoutred as Greeks, Gauls, Thracians, Samnites, or

murmillos; also he appeared in the equipment of each of these sorts of gladiators against antagonists equipped like himself or in any of the other fashions.

In all these countless fights he was never once wounded by any adversary nor did he ever deliver a second stroke, thrust or lunge against any: his defence was always impregnable, his attack always unerring; when he lunged his lunge never missed and was always fatal, unless he purposely spared a gallant foe.

Besides the exhibitions of bravado and self-confidence traditional with gladiators, all of which he displayed again and again, Palus devised more than one wholly original with himself.

For instance, he would take his stand in the arena equipped as a secutor, the lanista would have in charge not one retiarius, but ten, or even a dozen. One would attack Palus and when, after a longer or shorter contest, he was killed, the lanista, would, without any respite, allow a second to rush at Palus; then a third; and so on till everyone had perished by the secutor's unerring sword. No other secutor ever killed more than one retiarius without a good rest between the first fight and the second. Palus, as was and is well known, killed more than, a thousand adversaries, of whom more than three hundred wore the accoutrements of a retiarius.

Palus was even more spectacular as a dimachaerus, so called from having two sabers, for a dimachaerus is a gladiator accoutred as a Thracian, but without any shield and carrying a naked saber in each hand. Such a fighter is customarily matched against an adversary in ordinary Thracian equipment. He has to essay the unnatural feat of guarding himself with one sword while attacking with the other. Such a feat is akin to those of jugglers and acrobats, for a sword is essentially an instrument of assault and cannot, by its very nature, take the place of a shield as a protection. Everybody, of course, knows that showy and startling ruse said to have been invented by the Divine Julius, which consists in surprising one's antagonist by parrying a stroke with the sword instead of with the shield and simultaneously using the shield as a weapon, striking its upper rim against the adversary's chin. But this can succeed only against an opponent dull-witted, unwary, clumsy and slow, and then as a surprise. A dimachaerus has to depend on parrying and his antagonist knows what to expect.

Palus was the most perfect dimachaerus ever seen in the Colosseum. Without a shield he fought and killed many Thracians, Greeks, Gauls, murmillos, Samnites and secutors. He even, many times, fought two Thracians at once, killing both and coming off unscathed. I saw two of these exhibitions of insane self-confidence and I must say that Palus made good his reliance on his incredible skill. He pivoted about between his adversaries, giving them, apparently, every chance to attack simultaneously, distract him and kill

him. Yet he so managed that, even if their thrusts appeared simultaneous, there was between them an interval, brief as a heart-beat, but long enough for him to dispose of one and turn on the other, or escape one and pierce the other. I could not credit my own eyes. With my belief as to the identity of Palus I marvelled that a man whose life was dominated by the dread of assassination, who feared poison in his wine and food, who hedged himself about with guards and then feared the guards themselves, who distrusted everybody, who dreaded every outing, who was uneasy even inside his Palace, felt perfectly at ease and serenely safe in the arena with no defence but two sabers, and he between two hulking ruffians, as fond of life as any men, and knowing that they must kill him or be killed by him. In this deadly game he felt no qualms, only certitude of easy victory.

The controversies over the identity of Palus have produced a whole literature of pamphlets, some maintaining that he was Commodus, others professing to prove that he was not, of which some rehearse every possible theory of his relationship to Aurelius or Faustina. Among these the most amazing are those which set forth the view that Palus was Commodus, but no skillful swordsman, rather a brazen sham, killing ingloriously helpless adversaries who could oppose to his edged steel only swords of lath or lead.

This absurdity is in conflict with all the facts. Manifestly the antagonists of Palus were as well armed as he, both for defence and attack.

And, what is much more, the populace clamored for Palus, booed and cat-called if Palus did not appear in the arena; cheered him to the echo when he did appear; yelled with delight and appreciation at each exhibition of his prophetic intuition as to what his adversary was about to do, of his preternaturally perfect judgment as to what to do himself, of the instantaneous execution of whatever movement he purposed, of its complete success; and applauded him while he went off as no other gladiator ever was applauded. It was the popular demand for him which made possible and justified the unexampled fee paid Palus for each of his appearances in the arena. The managers of the games were obliged to include Palus in each exhibition or risk a riot of the indignant populace.

Now no sham fighter could fool the Roman populace. A make-believe swordsman, such as the pamphlets which I have cited allege Commodus to have been, might, if Emperor, have overawed the senators and nobles of equestrian rank and compelled their unwilling applause of sham feats. But no man, not even an Emperor, could coerce the Roman proletariat into applauding a fighter unworthy of applause. Our populace, once seated to view a show of any kind, cannot be controlled, cannot even be swayed. No fame of any charioteer, beast-fighter or gladiator can win from them tolerance of the smallest error

of judgment, defect of action, attempt at foul play or hint of fear: they boo anything of which they disapprove and not Jupiter himself could elicit from them applause of anything except exhibitions of courage, skill, artistry and quickness fine enough to rouse their admiration. They admired Palus, they adored him.

This is well known to all men and proves Palus a consummate artist as a gladiator. Not only would the populace howl a bungler or coward off the sand, they know every shade of excellence; only a superlatively perfect swordsman could kindle their enthusiasm and keep it at white heat year after year as did Palus.

Palus, I may remark, was always a gallant fighter, and a combination of skill and gallantry in an adversary so won his goodwill that he never killed or seriously wounded such an opponent. If his antagonist had an unusually perfect guard and a notably dangerous attack, was handsome, moved gracefully, displayed courage and fought with impeccable fairness Palus felt a liking for him, showed it by the way in which he stood on the defensive and mitigated the deadliness of his attacks, played him longer than usual to demonstrate to all the spectators the qualities he discerned in him, and, when he was convinced that the onlookers felt as he felt, disabled his admired match with some effective but trifling wound.

Then, when his victim collapsed, Palus would leap back from him, sheath his sword, and saw the air with his empty left hand, fingers extended and pressed together, thumb flat against the crack between the roots of the index finger and big finger, twisting his hand about and varying the angle at which he sawed the air, so that all might see that he wished his fallen adversary spared and was suggesting that the spectators nearest him imitate his gesture and give the signal for mercy by extending their arms thumbs flat to fingers.

Except Murmex Lucro I never saw any other gladiator presume to suggest to the spectators which signal he would like them to display; and Murmex had the air of a man taking a liberty with his betters and not very sure whether they would condone his presumption or resent his insolence; whereas Palus waved his arm much as Commodus raised his from the Imperial throne when, as Editor of the games, he decided the fate of a fallen gladiator concerning whom the populace were so evenly divided between disfavorers and favorers that neither the victor nor his lanista dared to interpret so doubtful a mandate.

The most amazing fact concerning Palus was that his audiences never wearied of watching him fence. It is notorious that the spectators in the Colosseum always have been and are, in general, impatient of any noticeable prolongation of a fight. Only a very small minority of the populace and a larger, but still small, minority of the gentry and

nobility, take delight in the fine points of swordsmanship for themselves. Most spectators, while acclaiming skilled fence and expecting it, look upon it merely as a means for adding interest to the preliminaries of what they desire to behold. Even senators and nobles admit that the pleasure of viewing gladiatorial shows comes from seeing men killed. Contests are thrilling chiefly because of their suggestion of the approach of the moment which brings the supreme thrill.

The populace, quite frankly, rate the fighting as a bore; they do not come to watch skilled swordsmen fence; they want to see two men face each other and one kill the other at once. It is the killing which they enjoy. The upper tiers of spectators in the amphitheater seldom give the signal for mercy when a defeated man is down and helpless, even though he be handsome and graceful and has fought bravely, skillfully and gallantly. One seldom sees an outstretched arm, with the hand extended, fingers close together and thumb flat against them, raised anywhere from the back seats; their occupants habitually, in such cases, wave their upraised arms with the hands clenched and thumbs extended, wagging their thumbs by half rotating their wrists, to make the thumb more conspicuous, yelling the while, so that the amphitheater is full of their insistent roar and the upper tiers aflash with flickering thumbs. They weigh no fine points as to the worth of the vanquished man, they do not value a good fighter enough to want him saved to fight again, they come to see men die and they want the defeated man slaughtered at once.

They are habituated to acquiescing if the Emperor—or the Editor, if the Prince is not present—or the nobility contravene their wishes and give the signal for mercy when a gallant fighter is down by accident, misadventure or because he was outmatched. But there is often a burst of howls if the signal for mercy comes not from the Imperial Pavilion or the whole podium, but merely from some part of the nobility or senators. Generally, if the Emperor has not given or participated in the signal for mercy, scattered individuals among the proletariat proclaim their disappointment by booing, cat-calls, or strident whistlings.

Now Palus was so popular, so beloved by the slum-dwellers, that whenever he showed a disposition to spare an opponent, the whole mass of the populace were quick with the mercy-signal: the moment they saw Palus sheathe his blade their arms went up with his, almost before his, thumbs as flat as his, never a thumb out nor any fingers clenched.

More than this, no spectator, while Palus played an adversary, ever yelled for a prompt finish to the bout, as almost always happened at the first sign of delay in the case of any other fighter. So comprehensible, so unmistakable, so manifest, so fascinating were the fine points of the swordsmanship displayed by Palus that even the rearmost spectator,

even the most brutish lout could and did relish them and enjoy them and crave the continuance of that pleasure.

Most of all the Colosseum audiences not only insisted on Palus appearing in each exhibition, not only longed for his entrance, not merely came to regard all the previous fights of the day as unwelcome postponements of the pleasure of watching Palus fence, but were manifestly impatient for the crowning delight of each day, the ecstasy of beholding a bout between Palus and Murmex Lucro, which contests were always bloodless.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXV MURMEX

Customarily, while Palus flourished, each day began with beast-fights, the noon pause was filled in by exhibitions of athletes, acrobats, jugglers, trained animals and such like, and the surprise; then the gladiatorial shows lasted from early afternoon till an hour before sunset. Palus and Murmex appeared about mid-afternoon and were matched against the victors in the earlier fights. Each located himself at one focus of the ellipse of the arena, at which points two simultaneous fights were best seen by the entire audience. There they began each fight, not simultaneously, but alternately, till all their antagonists were disposed of, most killed and some spared. The spectators seldom hurried Murmex to end a fight; they never hurried Palus. His longest delay in finishing with an adversary, even his manifest intention to exhaust an opponent rather than to wound him, never elicited any protest from any onlooker. All, breathless, fascinated, craned to watch the perfection of his method, every movement of his body, all eyes intent on the point of his matchless blade.

Last of the day's exhibitions, came the fencing match between Palus and Murmex, at the center of the arena, empty save for those two and their two lanistae. All others in the arena, including the surgeons, their helpers and the guards, drew off to positions close under the podium wall.

Murmex and Palus fenced in all sorts of outfits, except that neither ever fought as a retiarius. Mostly both were equipped as secutors, but they fought also as murmillos, Greeks, Gauls, Thracians, Samnites and dimachaeri, or one in any of these equipments against the other in any other.

Sometimes they delighted the populace by donning padded suits liberally whitened with flour or white clay, their murmillos' helmets similarly whitened, and then attacking each other with quarter-staffs of ash, cornel-wood or holly. A hit, of course, showed plainly on the whitened suits. As neither could injure the other in this sort of fight, and as they were willing to humor the populace, each was careless about his guard and reckless in his attack. Even so hits were infrequent, since each, even when most lax, had an instinctive guard superior to that of the most expert and cautious fencer among all other contemporary fighters. Even when, very occasionally, if Palus happened to be in a rollicking mood, each substituted a second quarter-staff for his shield and, as it were, travestied a dimachaerus, as what might be called a two-staff-man or a double-staff-man, hits were still not frequent. Each had a marvellously impregnable defence and they

were very evenly matched in the use of the quarter-staff in place of a shield as they were in everything else. Palus fought better with his left hand attacking and his right defending, Murmex better the other way, but each was genuinely ambidextrous and used either hand at will, shifting at pleasure. When, amid the flash of their staffs, either scored, the hit brought a roar of delight from the upper tiers, even from the front rows, for the most dignified senators caught the infection of the general enthusiasm and so far forgot themselves as to yell like street urchins in their ecstasy.

Except in this farcical sort of burlesque fight neither ever scored a hit on the other, in all the years throughout which their combats finished each day of every gladiatorial exhibition. Yet the audience never tired of their bloodless bouts and, while the nobility and gentry never joined in, the populace invariably roared a protest if they saw the lanistae make a move to separate them, and yelled for them to go on and fence longer.

The interest of the populace was caused by the fact, manifest and plain to all, that, while Murmex and Palus loved each other and had no intention of hurting each other, their matches had no appearance whatever of being sham fights. From the first parade until they separated every stroke, feint, lunge and thrust appeared to be in deadly, venomous earnest and each unhurt merely because, mortal as was his adversary's attack, his guard was perfect.

It seemed, in fact, as if each man felt so completely safe, felt so certain that his guard would never fail him, and at the same time felt so sure that his crony's guard was equally faultless, that there was no danger of his injuring his chum, that each attacked the other precisely as he attacked any other adversary. It was commonly declared among expert swordsmen and connoisseurs of sword-play, as among recent spectators, when, talking over the features of an exhibition after it was over, that practically every thrust, lunge or stroke of either in these bouts would have killed or disabled any other adversary; certainly it appeared so to me every time I saw them fence and especially while watching their bouts after I returned from my year at Baiae, for after that I never missed a gladiatorial exhibition in the Colosseum. To my mind Palus and Murmex were manifestly playing with each other, like fox-cubs or Molossian puppies or wolf-cubs; yet the sport so much resembled actual attack and defence, as with nearly grown wolf-cubs, that it gave less the impression of play between friends than that of deadly combat between envenomed foes. Many a time I have heard or overheard some expert or connoisseur or enthusiast or provincial visitor, prophesy somewhat in this fashion:

"Some day one of those two is going to kill the other unexpectedly and unintentionally and by mistake. Each thinks the other will never land on him; each thinks the other has a guard so impregnable that it will never be pierced; each uses on the other attacks so unexpected, so sudden, so subtle, so swift, so powerful, so sustained, so varied that no

third man alive could escape any one of them. It is almost a certainty that that sort of thing cannot go on forever. One or the other of them may age sufficiently to retire from the arena, as did Murmex Frugi, safe and unscarred, as he was not. But it is far more likely, since both are full of vitality and vigor, that neither will notice the very gradual approach of age, so that they will go on fighting with eyes undimmed, muscles supple and minds quick, yet not so quick, supple and keen as now: but the preternatural powers of one will wane a bit sooner than those of the other. And sooner or later one will err in his guard and be wounded or killed."

Most spectators agreed with such forecasts. What is more, most of the spectators admitted that, as they watched, each attack seemed certain to succeed; every time either man guarded it seemed as if he must fail to protect himself.

This, I think, explains the unflagging zest with which the entire audience, senators, nobles and commonality, watched their bouts, revelled in them, gloated over the memory of them and longed for more and more. Consciously or unconsciously, every onlooker felt that sometime, some bout would end in the wounding, disabling or death of one of the two. And so perfect was their sword-play, so unfeigned their unmitigated fury of attack, so genuine the impeccable dexterity of their defence that every spectator felt that the supreme thrill, even while so long postponed, was certain to arrive. More, each felt, against his judgment, that it was likely to arrive the next moment. It was this illogical but unescapable sensation which kept the interest of the whole audience, of the whole of every audience, at a white heat over the bouts of Murmex and Palus. I myself experienced this condition of mind and became infected with the common ardor. I found myself rehearsing to myself the incidents of their last-seen bout, anticipating the next, longing for it: though I never had rated myself as ardent over gladiatorial games, but rather as lukewarm towards them, and considered myself much more interested in paintings, statuary, reliefs, ornaments, bric-a-brac, furniture, fine fabrics and all artistries and artisanries. Yet I confessed to myself that, from the time I saw first a bout between them, anticipation of seeing them fence, or enjoyment of it, came very high among my interests and my pleasures.

To some extent, I think, the long and unequalled vogue of their popularity was due to the great variety of their methods and almost complete absence of monotony in their bouts.

Palus was left-handed, but for something like every third bout or a third of each bout he fought right-handed, merely for bravado, as if to advertise that he could do almost as well with the hand less convenient. Murmex was right-handed, but he too fought often left-handed, perhaps one-fifth of the time. So, in whatever equipment, one saw each of them fight both ways. Therefore as murmillos they fought both right-handed, both left-handed, and each right-handed against the other fighting left-handed. This gave a

perpetually shifting effect of novelty, surprise and interest to every bout between them. They similarly had four ways of appearing as Greeks, Gauls, Samnites, Thracians, secutors or dimachaeri.

Their bouts as dimachaeri were breathlessly exciting, for it was impossible, from moment to moment, to forecast with which saber either would attack, with which he would guard; and, not infrequently, one attacked and the other guarded with both. When they fought in this fashion Galen, it always appeared to me, looked uneasy, keyed up and apprehensive. Yet neither ever so much as nicked, flicked or scratched the other in their more than sixty bouts with two sabers apiece.

More than a dozen times they appeared as Achilles and Hector, with the old-fashioned, full-length, man-protecting shield, the short Argive sword and the heavy lance, half-pike, half-javelin, of Trojan tradition. Murmex threw a lance almost as far and true as Palus and the emotion of the audience was unmistakably akin to horror when both, simultaneously, hurled their deadly spears so swiftly and so true that it seemed as if neither could avoid the flying death. Palus, true to his nickname, never visibly dodged, though Murmex's aim was as accurate as his own; he escaped the glittering, needle-pointed, razor-edged spear-head by half a hand's-breath or less by an almost imperceptible inclination of his body, made at the last possible instant, when it seemed as if the lance had already pierced him. It was indescribably thrilling to behold this.

Besides fencing equipped as Gauls, Samnites, Thracians and secutors they appeared in every combination of any of these and of Greeks and murmillos with every other. Palus as a dimachaerus against Murmex as a murmillo made a particularly delectable kind of bout. Almost as much so Murmex as a Gaul against Palus as a Thracian. And so without end.

After my return from Baiae Falco pampered me more than ever and, in particular, arranged to take me with him to all amphitheater shows and have me sit beside him in the front row of the nobles immediately behind the boxes of the senators on the podium. This does not sound possible in our later days, when amphitheater regulations are strictly enforced, as they had been under the Divine Aurelius and his predecessors. But, while Commodus was Prince much laxity was rife in all branches of the government. After the orgies of bribe-taking, favoritism and such like in the heyday of Perennis and of Cleander, all classes of our society became habituated to ignoring contraventions of rules. Under Perennis and later under Cleander not a few senators took with them into their boxes favorites who were not only not of senatorial rank, nor even nobles, but not Romans at all: foreign visitors, alien residents of Rome, freedmen or even slaves, and the other senators, as a class exquisitely sensitive to any invasion of their privileges by outsiders, winked at the practice partly because some of them participated in it, much

more because they feared to suffer out-and-out ruin, if, by word or look, they incurred the disfavor of Perennis while he was all-powerful or, later, of the more omnipotent Cleander. When a senator saw another so violate propriety, privilege and law, he assumed that the acting Prefect of the Palace had been bribed and so dared not protest or whisper disapprobation.

Much more than the senators the nobles obtained secret license to ignore the rules, or ignored them without license, since, when so many violated the regulations, no one was conspicuous or likely to be brought to book. Falco, being vastly wealthy, probably bribed somebody, but I never knew: when I hinted a query he merely smiled and vowed that we were perfectly safe.

So I sat beside him through that unforgettable December day, at the end of which came the culmination of what I have been describing.

The day was perfect, clear, crisp, mild and windless. It was not cold enough to be chilling, but was cold enough to make completely comfortable a pipe-clayed ceremonial toga over the full daily garments of a noble or senator, so that the entire audience enjoyed the temperature and basked in the brilliant sunrays; for, so late in the year, as the warmth of the sun was sure to be welcome, the awning had not been spread. I, in my bizarre oriental attire, wore my thickest garments and my fullest curled wig and felt neither too cold nor too warm.

I never saw the Colosseum so brilliant a spectacle. It was full to the upper colonnade under the awning-rope poles, not a seat vacant. Spectators were sitting on the steps all up and down every visible stair; two or even three rows on each side of each stair, leaving free only a narrow alley up the middle of each for the passage in or out of attendants or others. Spectators filled the openings of the entrance-stairs, all but jamming each. In each of the cross-aisles spectators stood or crouched against its back-wall, ducking their heads to avoid protests from the luckier spectators in the seats behind them. The upper colonnade was packed to its full capacity with standees.

The program was unusual, gladiatorial exhibitions from the beginning of the show; and nothing else. The morning was full of brisk fights between young men; provincials, foreigners and some Italians, volunteer enthusiasts. The noon pause was filled in by routine fights of old or aging gladiators nearly approaching the completion of their covenanted term of service. It ended with a novelty, the encounter of two tight-rope walkers on a taut rope stretched fully thirty feet in the air. It was proclaimed that they were rivals for the favor of a pretty freedwoman and that they had agreed on this contest as a settlement of their rivalry. Certainly the two, naked save for breech-clouts and each armed with a light lance in one hand and a thin-bladed Gallic sword in the other, neared

each other with every sign of caution, enmity and courage. Their sparring for an opening lasted some time, but was breathlessly interesting. The victor kept his feet on the rope and pierced his rival, who fell and died from the spear-wound or the fall or both.

During the noon pause the Emperor had left his pavilion. When he returned I, from my nearby location, was certain that Commodus himself had presided all the morning, but that now Furfur was taking his place. Certainly Palus and Murmex entered the arena soon after the noon pause and gave an exhibition almost twice as long as usual, killing many adversaries. Before the sun was half way down the sky, as Palus finished an opponent with one of his all but invisible punctures of the thigh-artery, the upper tiers first and then all ranks acclaimed this as the death of the twelve- hundredth antagonist who had perished by his unerring steel.

The daylight had not begun to dim when Murmex and Palus faced each other for the fencing bout which was to end the day. Each was equipped as a secutor, Murmex in silvered armor, Palus all in gold or gilded arms. Their swords were not regulation army swords, such a secutors normally carried, but long-bladed Gallic swords, the longest-bladed swords ever used by any gladiators.

They made a wonderful picture as the lanistae placed them and stepped back: Murmex, burly, stocky, heavy of build, thick-set, massive, with vast girth of chest and bull-neck, his neatly-fitting plated gauntlet, huge on his big right hand, his big plated boots planted solidly on the sand, his polished helmet, the great expanse of his silvered shield, his silvered kilt-strap-scales and silvered greave-boots brilliant in the cool late light; opposite him Palus, tall, lithe, graceful, slim, agile, all in gleaming gold, helmet, corselet, shield, kilt, greave-boots and all. They shone like a composite jewel set in the arena as a cameo in the bezel of a ring. And the picture they made was framed in the hoop of spectators crowding the slopes of the amphitheater, all silent after the gusts of cheers which had acclaimed the two as they took their places.

If possible, their feints and assaults were more thrilling than ever, unexpected, sudden, swift, all but successful. As always neither capered or pranced, Murmex not built for such antics, Palus by nature steady on his feet. But, except that their feet moved cannily, every bit of the rest of either's body was in constant motion and moved swiftly. The gleam and flicker of thrust and parry were inexpressibly rapid. Even the upper tiers craned, breathless and fascinated; and we, further forward, were numb and quivering with excitement.

I have heard a hundred eye-witnesses describe what occurred. There was close agreement with what I seemed to see as I watched.

Palus lunged just as Murmex made a brilliantly unpredictable shift of his position. The shift and lunge came so simultaneously that neither had, in his calculated, predetermined movement, time to alter his intention; Murmex, you might say, threw his throat at the spot at which Palus had aimed his lunge. The sword-point ripped his throat from beside the gullet to against the spine, all one side of it. He collapsed, the blood spouting.

Palus cast the dripping sword violently from him, the gleaming blade flying up into the air and falling far off on the sand. The big shield fell from his right arm. Both his hands caught his big helmet, lifted it and threw it behind him. On one knee he sank by Murmex and, with his left hand, strove to staunch the gushing blood.

Before Galen, before even the lanistae could reach the two, Murmex died.

Palus staggered to his feet and put up his gory hand to his yellow curls, with a convincingly agonized gesture of grief and horror.

He uttered some words, I heard his voice, but not the words. Folk say he said:

"I have killed the only match I had on earth, the second-best fighter earth ever saw."

The audience, I among them, stared, awe-struck and fascinated, at Commodus laying a bloody hand on his own head; we shuddered: I saw many look back and forth from Palus in the arena to the figure on the Imperial throne.

The guards ran, the surgeons' helpers ran, even Galen ran, but Aemilius Laetus reached Palus first, and, between the dazed and stunned lanistae, picked up the big golden helmet and replaced it on his head, hiding his features. The distance from the podium wall to the center of the arena is so great, the distance from any other part of the audience so much greater, that, while many of the spectators were astounded, suspicious or curious, not one could be certain that Palus was, beyond peradventure, the Prince of the Republic in person. Palus stood there, alternately staring at his dead crony and talking to Laetus and Galen.

The heralds had run up with the guards. Laetus, without any pretense of consultation with the dummy Emperor on the throne, spoke to the heralds and each stalked off to one focus of the ellipse of the arena. Thence each bellowed for silence, their deep-toned, resonant, loud, practiced voices carrying to the upper colonnade everywhere. Silence, deep already since Murmex received his death-wound and broken only by whispers, deepened. The amphitheater became almost still. Into the stillness the heralds proclaimed that next day the funeral games of Murmex Lucro would be celebrated in the

Colosseum where he had died; that all persons entitled to seats in the Colosseum were thereby enjoined to attend, unless too ill to leave their homes: that all should come without togas, but, in sign of mourning for Murmex, wearing over their garments full-length, all- enveloping rain-cloaks of undyed black wool and similarly colored umbrella hats; that any person failing to attend so habited would be severely punished; that the show would be worth seeing, for, in honor of the Manes of Murmex, to placate his ghost, no defeated fighter would be spared and all the victors of the morning would fight each other in the afternoon.

Surely the tenth day before the Kalends of January, in December of the nine hundred and forty-fourth year of the City, [Footnote: 191 A.D.] the year in which Commodus was nominally consul for the seventh time, and Pertinax consul for the second time, saw the strangest audience ever assembled in the amphitheater of the Colosseum. I was there, seated, as on the day before, next my master, my gaudy Asiatic garments, like his garb of a noble of equestrian rank, hidden under a great raincoat and my face shaded by the broad brim of an umbrella hat.

The universal material conventional for mourners' attire is certainly appropriate and proper for mourning garb. For the undyed wool of black sheep, when spun and woven, results in a cloth dingy in the extreme. The wearing of garments made of it suits admirably with grief and gloom of spirit, deepens sadness, accentuates woe, almost produces melancholy. And the sight of it, when one is surrounded by persons so habited, conduces to dejection and depression. This equally was felt by the whole audience. Instead of being a space glaring in the sunlight shining on an expanse of white togas, the hollow of the amphitheater was a dingy area of brownish black under a lowering canopy of sullen cloud, for the sky was heavily overcast and threatened rain all day, though not a drop fell. The windless air was damp and penetratingly chilly, so that we almost shivered under our swathings. The discomfort of not being warm enough and the dispiriting effect of the grim sky and gloomy interior of the amphitheater was manifest in a sort of general impression of melancholy and apprehension.

Apprehension, or, certainly, uneasiness, pervaded the audience and, as it were, seemed to diffuse itself from the Imperial Pavilion, crowded, not, as usual, with jaunty figures in gaudy apparel, all crimson, blue, and green, picked out and set off by edgings of silver and gold, but with a solemn retinue, all hidden under dingy umbrella hats and swathed in rain- cloaks. To see the throne occupied by a human shape so obscured by its habiliments gave all beholders an uncanny feeling in which foreboding deepened into alarm. The appearance of the whole audience, still more of the Imperial retinue, was one to cause all beholders to interpret the garb of the spectators as ill-omened, almost as inviting disaster.

In the center of the arena was built up the pyre which was to consume all that was left of Murmex. It was constructed of thirty-foot logs, each tier laid across the one below it, the lower tiers of linden, willow, elm and other quick-burning woods, their interstices filled with fat pine-knots; the upper tiers of oak and maple, at which last I heard not a few whispered protests, for old-fashioned folk felt it almost a sacrilege that holy wood should be used to burn a gladiator, a man of blood. The pyre was thus a square structure thirty feet on a side and fully twenty feet high; each side showing silvered log-butts or log-ends, with gilded pine-knots all between; its top covered with laurel boughs, over which was laid a crimson rug with golden fringe, setting off the corpse of Murmex, which lay in the silver armor he had worn in his last fight, high on the mound of laurel boughs.

At each focus of the arena was placed a round marble altar, one to Venus Libitina, one to Pluto. By these the heralds took their stands and proclaimed that no offerings would be made at the altars except one black lamb at each, that every man slain in the day's fighting would be an offering to the Manes of Murmex, since the day would be occupied solely with the celebration of funeral games for the solace of his ghost.

The games began with a set-to of sixteen pairs of gladiators fighting simultaneously. After this was over the sixteen victors drew off towards one end of the arena and sixteen other pairs fought simultaneously. After them the victors of the first set paired off as the lanistae arranged and the eight pairs fought. The eight victors again rested while the survivors of the second set simultaneously fought as eight pairs. So they alternated till only two men survived. A third batch of thirty-two gladiators then fought in sixteen pairs: then the two survivors of the first and second batches fought. The heralds proclaimed that the sole survivor of the first sixty-four would fight again in the afternoon. So with the sole survivor of the third and fourth batches. This grim butchery gave a savage tone to the whole day. All the morning many pairs fought, till one of each pair was killed. But, after the fourth batch, every victor in any fight was reserved to fight again in the afternoon.

To my eyesight the figure on the throne, even under that broad hat-brim and enveloped in that thick rain-cloak, was manifestly Commodus in person. Unmistakably his was every Imperial gesture as he presided as Editor of the games.

During the noon interval, as usual, the Emperor retired to his robing-room under the upper tiers of the amphitheater. When again, after the noon interval, the throne was reoccupied, I felt certain that its occupant was Ducconius Furfur.

At any rate Palus appeared at once after the noon interval and the first fight was between him and the survivor of the sixty-four wretches, who had begun the day's

butchery. Palus, of course, killed his man, but with more appearance of effort and less easily than any adversary he had ever faced under my observation. The people cheered his victory, but not so enthusiastically as usual. He did not appear again till the last event of the day, which was a series of duels between champions in two-horse chariots, driven by expert charioteers, they and the fighters equipped with arms and armor such as was used by both sides at the siege of Troy. Horses are seldom seen in the Colosseum and these pairs, frantic at the smell of blood, taxed to the utmost the skill and strength of their drivers, particularly as they were controlled by the old-fashioned reins of the Heroic period, the manipulation of which calls for methods different from those effective with our improved modern reins.

The charioteers were capable and their dexterous maneuvering for every advantage of approach and relative position won many cheers. Eight pairs fought, then the eight victors paired off, then the four victors, then the two. The sole survivor then retired and while he was out of the arena there entered a superb pair of bay horses, drawing a chariot of Greek pattern, in which, to the amazement of all beholders, was Narcissus, the wrestler, himself, habited as Automedon and acting as charioteer; while beside him, magnificent in a triple crested crimson-plumed helmet of the Thessalian type, in a gilded corselet of the style of the Heroic age, with gilded scales on its kilt-straps, with gilded greaves, with a big gilded Argive shield embossed with reliefs, and holding two spears, manifestly habited as Achilles, stood Palus.

When his refreshed antagonist reentered in a Trojan chariot and armored and armed as Hector of Troy, Palus handed his two spears to his Automedon, leapt from his chariot, walked over to Hector's, and spoke to him. I heard it reported afterwards that he said:

"It would spoil the program for Hector to slay Achilles, but you have as much chance of killing me as I of killing you. I am so shaken by Murmex's death that I am not the man I was yesterday morning and up till then. I never felt so nearly matched as by you, not even by Murmex. Attack and spare not. I have given orders that, if you kill me, you shall not suffer for it in any way. I don't want to live, anyhow, now Murmex is dead."

Whether he said this or something else, he spoke earnestly and walked back to his chariot nearby, without any elasticity in his tread.

Narcissus, the wrestler, to the astonishment of the spectators, proved himself a paragon horse jockey. Everyone knew him as a wrestler, as reported the strongest man alive, as claimed by his admirers to have a more powerful hand-grasp than any rival, as the favorite wrestling-mate of the Emperor; all the notabilities had seen him and Commodus wrestle in the Stadium of the Palace; all Rome knew him for a crony of the Prince; yet no one had ever heard him praised or even mentioned as a charioteer. Yet he

showed himself a matchless horseman. Hector's charioteer was a master, yet Narcissus outmaneuvered him, gained the advantage of angle of approach and, after many turns, gave Palus his chance. The two great lances flew almost simultaneously; but, as Achilles dodged, Hector fell dying of a mortal wound in the throat.

What followed was, apparently, according to the prearranged program and was indubitably in keeping with the equipment of the two champions and their charioteers; yet it horrified me, and I think all the senators and nobles as well as most of the audience. As Hector sprawled horribly on the sand Narcissus veered his pair and, as they passed the fallen man, Achilles leapt from his chariot. Drawing his Argive sword he slashed the dying man across his abdomen; then, sheathing his blade, he stood, one foot on his adversary's neck and, raising his lance and shield, shouted: "Enalie! Enalie! Enalie!" the old Greek invocation to the war-god. Then he threw aside his lance and shield and stripped off the armor from the dead. Arena-slaves carried it to the pyre and placed it upon it, by Murmex.

Narcissus had wheeled the chariot in a short circle and halted it as near Palus as he could keep it and control the frantic horse. Palus took from one of the hand-holds at the back of the chariot-rail a long leathern thong. With his dirk he slit each foot of the corpse between the leg-bone and the heel-tendon; through the slit he passed the thong, knotting it to his liking. The doubled thong he tied securely to the rear rim of the chariot-bed. Retrieving his lance and shield he posed an instant, every inch Achilles, stepped over Hector's naked corpse and mounted the chariot. From Automedon he took the reins and the whip, passing him his lance, yet retaining his great circular shield, nowise hampered by which he drove the chariot round and round the pyre, the picture, as all could see, he felt, of Achilles placating the ghost of Patroclus.

This exhibition shocked the whole audience, upper tiers and all. The ghost of a hiss breathed under the tense hush of the silent beholders. A shudder ran over the hollow of the amphitheater, as the dragged corpse, mauled by the sand and turning over, became a mere lump of pounded meat. The chill of the onlookers appeared to reach Palus. He halted his team near the pyre, arena-slaves dragged away Hector's corpse, one brought a lighted torch and Palus himself kindled the pyre at each of its four corners, walking twice round it. When it was enveloped in crackling flames, he mounted the chariot and Narcissus drove him out; drove him out, to the horror of all beholders by the Gate of Ill-omen.

After he vanished through that gate no amphitheater ever again beheld Palus the Gladiator.

When he was gone all eyes were fixed on the kindling pyre. The flames blazed up all round it and above it, the smoke mounted skyward in a thick column, the crackle and

roar of the flames was audible all over the amphitheater; so deep was the solemn stillness. I shall carry to my last living hour the vivid recollection of that picture: under the grim gray sky, framed in by the sable hangings which draped the upper colonnade, and by the clingy audience, against the yellow sand, that column of sooty smoke and below it the red glare of the blazing pyre.

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXVI ANXIETY

After my seclusion at Baiae, up to the terrible events which I am about to narrate, by far the most important of my experiences had been my personal observations of the fights of Palus the Gladiator and what I had heard and thought about him. Therefore I have narrated those at length and first. Now I approach the story of my most dreadful miseries.

From my return to Rome my life had gone on much as it had before my master had compelled me to impersonate Salsonius Salinator and, in so doing, to resume my natural appearance as I had looked while my genuine self, and thus, undisguised, to mingle with the associates of my normal early life. After my hair and beard had regained their previous luxuriance and I was again painted, rouged, frizzed, bejeweled, and bedizened, I felt safe and, was in fact, almost entirely safe. In this guise I enjoyed life. Falco was indulgent to me and I had every luxury at my command.

Falco's mania for gem-collecting did not wane, but, if possible, grew on him. His ventures all prospered, his profits from risky speculations poured in, his normal income from his heritage increased; and, of all this opulence, every surplus denarius was paid out for gems and curios. Yet he never was so much a faddist as to lose a day from the games of the circus and the amphitheater. He viewed every show of gladiators, every day of racing, almost every combat and every race.

The day after the spectacular games for Murmex and his more spectacular cremation, the eighth day before the Kalends of January, was nominally the last racing day of the year. The weather was fair and mild. The Circus Maximus was crowded, the Imperial Pavilion blazed with the retinue about the Emperor, he and all of us enjoyed the thirty races of four four-horsed chariots to each. I mention this because it was his last public appearance.

The festivities of the Saturnalia, which I had prepared for according to Falco's orders with lavish prodigality, left me more than a little weary. I spent some days mostly in resting and dozing, being drowsy all day, even with long nights of sound sleep.

On the fatal last day of the year I did not go out, but read or dozed and went early to bed. I slept heavily, knowing nothing from composing myself in bed until I awakened suddenly in the almost complete darkness of the first hint of light at the dawn of a

cloudy, windless winter day, I woke with a sense of having been roused, of something unusual; and, vaguely descrying a human figure by my bed asked, sleepily:

"Is that you, Dromo?"

"No," said Agathemer's voice, "it is I."

I raised myself on one elbow, shot through with foreboding. But my apprehensions were mastered by an idle curiosity. I knew he had some imperative reason for coming to me, yet I did not ask his errand, but queried:

"How on earth did you get in?"

"The house-door was open," he said simply.

"But," I marvelled, "I am surprised that the janitor was awake so early."

"He was not," said Agathemer with deliberate emphasis, "he was as fast asleep in his cell on the right of the vestibule as was the watch-dog in his on the left."

"And you walked past both unnoticed?" I hazarded.

"I did," said he, "and you had best warn Falco somehow or induce him to sell his janitor and buy one he can trust or to put in his place some trusty home-slave. That is no sort of a janitor for the house containing the second-largest private gem-collection in all Rome. Nor any sort of watch-dog."

"How came the door unbarred?" I wondered, "who showed you up here?"

"I came up alone," said Agathemer, significantly. "I have not seen a human being except the snoring janitor. This house is at the mercy of any sneak- thief. But you can return to that later. I have come to tell you good news. Commodus is dead!"

"Really?" I quavered.

Oddly enough I felt no sense of relief. Before my eyes arose the picture of Commodus as I had seen him facing the mutineers from Britain before he condemned Perennis: I recalled how often I had heard said of him that he was the noblest born of all our Emperors from the Divine Julius down; that he was the handsomest and the strongest man in any assembly about him, however large; that in his Imperial Regalia he looked more imperial than any man ever had: I contrasted his possession of these qualities with

his pitiful squandering of his boundless opportunities, with his frittering away his life on horse-racing, sword-play and such like frivolities. I could not think of myself, only of what Commodus might have been and had not been. I mourned for him and Rome.

Agathemer sat down on the edge of my bed and told his story.

"You know," he said, "that, as gem-expert and as salesman for Orontides, I have many friends in the Palace. I have carefully kept out of it myself and Orontides has acquiesced, for I told him I had good reason to avoid going in there, as you well know I have. If Marcia had seen me she would have recognized me and I should not have lived many hours, for she, believing you dead, would regard me as, of all men, the most likely to see through the utilization of Ducconius Furfur as a dummy Emperor to free Commodus for masquerading as Palus. She would want me out of the way as the only man in Rome who had known Furfur in Sabinum. Therefore I kept away from the Palace.

"But my good friends among the valets and chamberlains and secretaries, and even higher officials have not only kept me posted as to the most interesting happenings, intrigues and rumors, but one or two close to the Emperor have regularly communicated to me many details of Palace gossip."

Daily, since the death of Murmex, Agathemer had been informed of long, heated and ever longer and more violent discussions between Commodus and Marcia, often, with Eclectus also present and participating, for he had been acting towards Commodus more as an equal toward a crony than as Head Chamberlain of the Palace towards his master. Laetus, too had also participated, sometimes in place of Eclectus, sometimes along with him, for he also had been comporting himself more as a chum of Commodus than as Prefect of the Praetorium towards his Emperor.

The substance of the discussions had been always the same. Commodus, at once after the death of Murmex, announced his intention of turning his Imperial duties and dignities over to Ducconius Furfur and of going to the Choragium, there and thenceforward to live and to die as Palus the Gladiator. He declared that as Emperor he never had an hour free from anxiety, always in dread of assassination by poison or otherwise, whereas, as a gladiator among gladiators, he felt perfectly safe and carefree, beloved and watched over by all his companions and certain to win all his fights.

"As Emperor," he said, "I'll not live a year; as Palus I'll most likely die of old age, forty years or more from now. Furfur and I are so alike that no one can tell us apart, so no one will ever suspect that the man acting as Emperor is not the same man who has filled that place ever since Father died."

Marcia had talked to him of his duty and he had rejoined that he had always known that he was unfit to be the Emperor, had feared his responsibilities, had undertaken them unwillingly, had mostly bungled them, and the world would be far better off with anybody else as Emperor, that everybody knew it and that he was despised by the whole Senate and nobility and for that reason more unhappy although he was unhappy enough so anyhow, without the covert jeers of the magistrates; whereas he was the best gladiator ever and all gladiators and experts acknowledged and acclaimed him peerless; as a gladiator he would be happy and enjoy life up to whatever end came to him, preferably an unexpected accidental sudden death such as had befallen Murmex. Ducconius Furfur had not only sat in his throne at shows, but had received embassies, read better than he the addresses composed for him by his Prefects of the Praetorium and Secretaries, knew all the tricks of the office and could and would be a better Emperor than ever he had been.

When Eclectus and Laetus argued with him the results were similar.

Then Marcia admonished him that while Furfur had escaped detection in mere routine matters he was certain to be detected within a few days if he essayed all the Imperial duties before all sorts of people. In that case some sort of revolt would abolish him and put a new Emperor in place of him and any such chosen autocrat would quickly order the death of Palus the Gladiator to assure himself the throne. To this line of argument Commodus had been as deaf as to all other lines.

"Why," he had said, "if I change clothes with Furfur you wouldn't know the difference yourself. If we both were garbed as Emperor, Laetus wouldn't know which to obey. And if my wife and most loyal servant cannot tell which is which when we are side by side and habited alike, who will ever suspect that Furfur is not I when I am out of the way, far off, living as Palus the Swordsman, never alongside the Emperor or in sight at the same time? The plan cannot miscarry."

He had announced that he meant on the Kalends of January to take up his abode in the Choragium and leave the Palace and its adjuncts and all his prerogatives to Ducconius Furfur. He had Furfur in and the five had a heated wrangle. Furfur, after the discussion, had another with Marcia, Eclectus and Laetus, declaring that he thought the scheme as insane as they thought it, but dared not show reluctance for fear of being put to death at once: as an impostor Emperor he would, at least, have a chance, if a faint chance, of success and survival.

Then they all had a long altercation on the last day of the year, during which Commodus cursed Marcia and Eclectus and Laetus and vowed he would have them all executed if

they mentioned the subject again. He imperiously bade them acquiesce and so silenced them.

Then he made Furfur, who pretended to him that he was delighted, remain to drink with him. They drank till both were dead drunk and snoring.

Marcia, finding them so, held a consultation with Eclectus and Laetus and proposed to have Narcissus strangle Furfur, saying that with Furfur out of the way Commodus might come to his senses: she would risk his wrath and be resigned to death if she failed to placate him; for, with Furfur dead, he could not carry out his crazy intentions. She said she loved Commodus so much that she was willing to save him even at the cost of her own life.

Eclectus and Laetus acclaimed her plan and were overjoyed at their opportunity, for all three hated Furfur. Yet, all three shrank from going into the room with Narcissus. He, entering alone, mistook the two sleepers, who had changed clothes, and by mistake for Furfur, strangled Commodus. After his victim was indubitably dead and past any possibility of reviving he summoned his accomplices and, when Marcia shrieked and fainted, for the first time realized his blunder.

Then, frantic, he seized Furfur and strangled him to death long before Eclectus had revived Marcia from her swoon.

As Agathemer told it to me all this came out in a haphazard tangle of unfinished sentences, interruptions, fresh starts, questions, answers, repetitions and explanations.

Meanwhile the day had dawned gray and lowering. Of all my strange experiences none were more eery than that talk with Agathemer, beginning in the dark and, with his form and features and expressions effaced, gradually becoming more and more visible. And towards the end of his disclosures he checked himself in the middle of a word and, raising his hand, whispered:

"Hark!"

Silent and tense, we listened. Even in my bedroom, opening on the side gallery of the peristyle, we heard, from over the roofs, cries of:

"The tyrant is dead! The despot is dead! The prize-fighter is dead! The murderer is dead!"

"The news is out!" Agathemer ejaculated, and he breathed a prayer to Mercury, in which I joined. When finally he had told all he had to tell I marvelled:

"Can it be possible that the most intimate and secret conversations of the Prince of the Republic, of the most sedulously guarded man on earth, are thus overheard by underlings and so promptly communicated even to outsiders presumably to be reckoned among his enemies?"

"I conjecture," Agathemer rejoined, "that I am not the only outsider in receipt of information of this kind."

"If you have been, all along," I asked, "in receipt of such information, why have you always talked of Furfur's presence in the Palace and his utilization as a dummy Emperor while Commodus masqueraded as Palus, as a conjecture of yours which you believed, but of which you could not be certain? Why have you not frankly spoken of it as a fact, which many knew of and of which some in a position to know, repeatedly informed you?"

"Because no one ever did so inform me," Agathemer answered, "they merely dropped hints, mostly hints, unnoticed by themselves, unintentionally dropped by them, and uncertainly pieced together by me. While Commodus was alive each of my informants, however fond of me, however under obligations to me, however anticipative of profit from me, however eager to curry favor with me, yet had vividly before him the dread of death, of death with torture, if any disloyalty of his, any dereliction in deed, word or thought, came to the notice of Commodus or Laetus or Eclectus, or if any one of them came to harbor any suspicion of him. All were vague, guarded, indefinite, cautious.

"Since midnight all that has changed. None fears any retribution for blabbing; all feel an overmastering urge towards confiding in some one. The three who, each unknown to the others, have resorted to me, told me unreckonably more than I previously conjectured. I comprehend the entire situation, now."

"If so," I said, "make me comprehend it. I do not. How could Furfur be coerced or persuaded to such an imposture? How could he be domiciled in the Palace along with Marcia and Commodus and the deception maintained? How could the three personally endure or even sustain the difficulties of the situation?"

"It all hinged," Agathemer explained, "on the fact that Furfur was insanely in love with Marcia, that Marcia hated and loathed him and that Commodus realized how each felt to the other. He was so sure of Marcia's detestation of Furfur that he was never jealous of him, so sure of Furfur's complete subserviency to Marcia that he never feared betrayal by him. Actually, from what I hear, Furfur complied as he did partly from loyalty to Commodus, partly from fear of him, partly, perhaps, from a sort of relish for his risky

impersonation, but chiefly because he was wax in Marcia's hands; as, indeed, was every man who came within reach of her fascinations. Does that explain it?"

"Enough," I agreed. "Perhaps as far as it can or could be explained."

"The main thing," said Agathemer, "is that Commodus is dead."

"I should be pleased to hear that," I said, "and I am and I thank you. But, somehow, I am unable to think of myself. Uppermost in my mind is the thought of the dead autocrat, of his unlimited power, of his inability to surround himself with trustworthy dependents, and of all you have had hinted to you and, even to-night, told you. In such a world, who can consider himself safe?"

Agathemer looked piqued.

"I reckoned," he said, "that you would feel, if not safe, at least less unsafe upon hearing my announcement."

"I do," said I, "for, under any other Prince, I should be less in danger, and, when we learn who is chosen Emperor, it may turn out that I have some chance of rehabilitation."

"Laetus and Eclectus," said Agathemer, "have decided to make Pertinax Emperor. When my informer left the Palace they had already set off to find Pertinax, presumably at his home, and offer him the Principate."

"That," I gloried, "is truly good news. I knew him as a young noble knows many an older senator: he may remember me. He should have nothing against me. You raise my hopes high!"

"By all means be hopeful and cheerful," said Agathemer, "but stick to your present disguise and continue your present way of life until we are sure. Do not be rash."

We consulted further and he said:

"I'll keep away from you except when it seems imperative to talk with you. I shall not send any more letters than I must. Do not write to me. If you must see me, it will be safe to come to Orontides' shop, as Falco is continually sending you there about gems. You can nod to me without any uttered word and I'll then come here as soon as may be."

He left just as dawn brightened into full day.

Among the first proclamations of our new Emperor was one expressly abolishing the court for prosecuting accusations for infringement of the Imperial Majesty by incautious words or inadvertent acts and at the same time decreeing the recall of every living exile banished for such transgressions; also specifically rehabilitating the memory of all persons who had been under Commodus, put to death on the pretext of this sort of guilt. Before the end of the day on which this decree was promulgated I received a letter from Agathemer in which he wrote:

"Beware! Keep close. Already it is rumored that exceptions to this decree have been made. Marcia is still alive, is married to Eclectus, and Eclectus is confirmed as Palace Chamberlain. With Marcia close to the Emperor you are not safe, no matter who is Emperor. Keep close!"

I followed his advice, which was easy for me to do, as I was very comfortable and well habituated to my life. Moreover I was buoyed up with hope of early rehabilitation and of then marrying Vedia, who sent me one cautiously worded note, congratulating me on the disappearance of my most dangerous foe, warning me that I still had formidable enemies alive and in high places, and begging me to be prudent. She reiterated her expressions of love, devotion and fidelity.

From Tanno also I received a letter warning me to be on guard and to efface myself as much as possible.

Falco, who had loathed Commodus, but had been careful to keep a still tongue on all matters except horse-racing, sword-play, social pleasures and gem-collecting, was much relieved at his death, and heartily delighted with his successor. He took pains to be present among the auditors of Pertinax whenever nobles were admitted along with the senators to listen to his addresses, which was almost always. He took to heart the new Emperor's adjurations as to economy and his invectives against the evils of speculative enterprises of all kinds. Over our wine after dinner, when we two dined alone together, much as Agathemer and I had when I was my former self, he unbosomed himself to me.

"Pertinax is right," he averred, "there is a real difference between enterprises which enrich only the participants and those which, while profiting their promoters, also add to the wealth of the Republic. I applaud his distinction between the two. I agree with him that wealthy men like me should invest their capital in nothing which does not benefit mankind as well as themselves. I have realized with a shock of shame that my greed for cash to spend on jewels has led me to embark in ventures which merely divert into my coffers the proceeds of other men's efforts, without adding anything to the sum-total of usable wealth. I mean to withdraw from all such monetary acrobatics and utilize my surplus in extending my estates, in buying others, in cattle-breeding, sheep-raising,

goat-herding, and in the cultivation of olives, vines, and other such remunerative growths, along with wheat-farming. Thus I will add to the resources of the Republic, while increasing my own cash income.

"Our conscientious Prince is equally correct in exhorting us to eschew all frivolities. I'll buy no more gems. Nay, I'll auction my collection, as soon as Rome recovers its calm and purchasers are as eager as last year. I'll invest the proceeds in productive enterprise. Thus, as Pertinax says, I shall be a more useful citizen and an even happier man."

Actually he at once initiated his arrangements for closing out the speculative ventures which he controlled and for withdrawing from those in which he participated. And he bought no more gems, though he talked gems as much as previously, or even more, and took great pride in showing visitors over his collection or in conning his treasures in company with me or even entirely alone by himself.

His enthusiasm for Pertinax grew warmer day by day and he talked of him, praising him, lauded him, prophesied for him great things and from him great benefits to the Republic and the Empire.

The alleged conspiracy against Pertinax of Consul Sosius Falco and his disgrace and relegation to his estates was a great shock to my master. That his cousin should plot against the Prince of our Republic, or lay himself open to accusation of such plotting, appeared to him hideous and shameful. He felt disgraced himself, as bearing the same family name. He gloomed and mourned over the matter.

The murder of Pertinax, by his own guards, on the fifth day before the Kalends of April, when he had been less than three months Emperor, was even a more violent shock to Falco, who was crushed with horror at such a crime. He was even more horrified at the arrogance of the guilty Praetorians and at their shameless effrontery in offering the Imperial Purple to the highest bidder and in, practically, selling the Principiate to so bestial a Midas as Didius Julianus, who, of all the senators, seemed most to misbecome the Imperial Dignity and who had nothing to recommend him except his opulence.

During the days of rioting which followed the murder of Pertinax we, naturally, kept indoors. When the disorders abated and the streets of Rome resumed their normal activities, Falco continued to remain at home. I expostulated with him, but he appeared, suddenly, a changed man, as if dazed and stunned by recent events. He, who had been continually on the go, living in a round of social pleasures, became averse to much of what he had before revelled in. My most ingenious pleadings were required to induce him to go to the Public Baths, which fashionable clubhouses he had frequented every afternoon from his first arrival at Rome. Until the death of Pertinax he had only very

occasionally dined alone with me: nearly every day he went out to a formal dinner or entertained a large batch of guests at a lavish banquet. After Pertinax's murder he began to refuse invitations to dine and he gave fewer dinners. He spent a great deal of his time with his lawyers and accountants and went over the affairs of his African estates, minutely, one by one and all of them. He made a new will and told me of it.

"Phorbas," he said, "I am troubled with forebodings. I have never thought of death until recently, except as of something far off and to be considered much later: since the murder of our good Emperor I think of it continually. If I live long enough to see normal conditions restored I shall follow the suggestions given to me by the addresses of Pertinax and shall auction my gems. Meanwhile I dread that I may not live to do so. Therefore I have made a will leaving my entire collection to you. I hereby enjoin you, should you come into possession of them, to sell the gems at auction, as soon as you see fit, and to invest the proceeds in enterprises which shall add to the wealth of the Republic. This bequest is a trust. Besides I have, as in former wills, bequeathed to you your freedom, and a legacy sufficient to make you comfortable for life. Moreover I have made you the heir of one-fourth of my estate, what remains of it after the gem collections is yours and all specific legacies are paid. I do not love my nephews and cousins and have bequeathed to them more than they deserve; as to the toadies who have hung about me and fawned on me in the hope of legacies, I despise them all. You are my best friend and chief heir."

I thanked him effusively and was so much affected that I myself began to have uncomfortable, vague forebodings. Agathemer happened to visit me and I confided to him the contents of my old leather amulet-bag. Of course I had not worn it since I began life with Falco, as a greasy old amulet-bag of the meanest material and pattern was wholly out of keeping with the character I had assumed. I wore instead a flat locket of pure gold, containing a talisman from the Pontic fastnesses. I had kept my share of our mountain trove of stolen jewels, not needing to part with any after Falco bought me and unconcerned for the gems, as I now needed no such store of savings. Now, suddenly, I felt uneasy about myself, my future and my possessions. These jewels I therefore placed in Agathemer's keeping, sure that they would be safer with him than with me and certain that he could realize on them quickly and transmit to me promptly whatever sums I might need.

I did all I could to rouse Falco from his lethargy and succeeded to some extent. But, all through April and May, he went out little, accepted few invitations and gave few dinners. Much of his time he spent among his jewels, conning them, handling them, taking curios from their cases and, as it were, caressing them. The rooms which held them were on the left hand side of the peristyle on the upper floor, across the court from my apartment and not precisely opposite it. There were three rooms; the larger with a door

on the gallery, and a smaller on either side of it, opening from it and lit by windows towards the gallery. Each room had a marble table in the middle, small and round in both side cabinets, rectangular and large in the main room. Each of the three rooms was walled with cases and shelves; on the shelves were displayed his larger curios, vases, cameos, intaglios, plaques, murrhine bowls and such like; in the cases were necklaces, bracelets, rings, seals and trays of unset gems of all sorts and sizes. Here Falco spent hours each day, gloating over his treasures.

"Phorbas," he said, "I am resolute never to buy another gem, equally resolute to auction all I have whenever conditions make a profitable sale probable. Yet, although I feel that I shall never live to see them auctioned, the very thought of parting with them cuts me to the quick. I am almost in tears to think of it. I love every piece I own. I hate to think I must either live to see them sold or die and leave them. I cannot be with them enough of my time. I could spend all my waking hours enjoying their loveliness and my luck in owning them."

I thought this condition of mind positively unhealthy and consulted Galen.

"You are right," he said, "and you are wrong too. Your master is badly shaken by the horrors of this appalling year, but he is not deranged nor, at this present time, in any more danger of derangement than most of the senators and nobles with whom he associates. Yet you are correct in being uneasy. Don't antagonize him, but do all you can, tactfully and unobtrusively, to keep him away from those jewels and to get him out to the Baths of Titus or to dinners. Do your utmost to induce him to entertain. A jolly dinner with a bevy of jovial guests will be the very medicine for him."

Had I been a Greek I could not have been, more wily or more successful. He spent less time with his gems, went out to the Baths oftener, accepted some dinner invitations and gave a few dinners. He even took some interest in preparing for these and in giving orders about them. He had five complete sets of silverware for his triclinium and had a fancy for using this or that set, according to the characters of his prospective guests.

Early in May he had invited a carefully selected company of concordant guests, three senators and the rest nobles like himself, and was anticipating a delightful evening. He had bidden me to see to the selection of the flowers for decorating the triclinium, for the garlands, and for sprinkling on the floor; to choose the wines I thought would be most appropriate and to have brought out and used his most prized set of silver, the work of Corinnos of Rhodes, embossed with scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and acclaimed one of the finest services in Rome. Besides the two tall mixing-bowls for tempering the wine before serving it, the set had four smaller ones, about the size of well-buckets, and much like them, for each was provided with two hinged handles, just like a water-pail. I

saw to the polishing of every piece in this magnificent service, to their proper disposal, to the decoration of the triclinium with flowers, verified the wines I had chosen, inspected every detail of the preparations for the feast, and, just before the first guest might be expected to arrive, went out and back into the kitchen to make sure that every dish of each course was being properly prepared and that nothing would be lacking.

When I returned to the triclinium I found it swept clean of silver, except the two big wine mixers. The four two-handled pails were gone and with them the salt-cellars, the wine strainers, every soup-spoon, every oyster-spoon, in fact every small piece, to the last. The thieves must have been deft, agile and keen, for nothing was upset or disturbed and I had heard no noise.

I rushed to the house-door, found it ajar and, each sleeping in his cell, on the one side the snoring janitor, on the other our fat, puffy, overfed watchdog.

I omit my hasty measures for pursuing the thieves and attempting their capture or at least the recovery of their booty; and my urgent and important efforts to arrange that our guests should be properly received and the dinner should not be spoiled. Towards this last I did what could be done and with fair success, Falco playing up to my suggestions and dissimulating his chagrin.

More important to record was his amazing indifference to his loss. Not that he did not feel it acutely, but that he seemed to feel no proper indignation against those at fault.

He questioned the janitor and all the slaves concerned, but instead of ordering scourged the two servitors whom I had left in the triclinium when I went out of it to visit the kitchen and who should have remained there until my return, he merely reprimanded them mildly. He did not so much as have the undutiful janitor flogged, let alone sent away for sale. He even laughed at the luck, alertness, dexterity and swiftness of the thieves; picturing their glance into the unshut door, their glances up and down the street, their eyeings of the watchdog and janitor, their noiseless dash into the atrium, their invasion of the triclinium, their gathering of the smaller pieces into the four handled wine-mixers, and their escape, each with two silver pails stuffed with goblets, salt-cellars, and bowls and, brimming with strainers, spoons and other small pieces.

He commented on their luck in not encountering any of his approaching guests.

"Mercury," he said, "to whom you chiefly pray, must have been good to them, as his votaries."

I was horrified at the levity of his attitude of mind. When we were alone I remonstrated with him, saying that such leniency was certain to demoralize his household; would ruin any set of slaves. I told him that his retention of the janitor after Agathemer's unnoticed entrance on the first day of the year was bad enough, far worse was it to condone a second lapse, and that having had consequences so serious. I expostulated that it was madness to entrust his housedown to a watchman already twice caught asleep at his post. I reminded him of the cash value of his gem-collection and of its value in his eyes, not to be reckoned in cash. He listened indulgently and said:

"I thank you, Phorbas. All you say is true. And, any time last year, I should have sold that janitor without a thought, after your information against him last January. But, somehow, since the murder of Commodus, yet more since the murder of Pertinax, I seem less prone to severity and more inclined to mercy. The waiter-boys deserve flogging, but I cannot harden my heart and order it. The janitor merits being sold without a character, after a severe scourging; yet I feel for him, too. I'll give him another chance."

I could not move him.

I again consulted Galen:

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "A Roman nobleman who hesitates to have his slaves flogged or sold and merely reprimands them, is certainly deranged. Any natural Roman would insist on scourgings and even severer punishments, But his eccentricity is not dangerous to him or anybody as yet. Humor him, do not oppose his worship of his treasures, but entice him away from them all you can by devices he does not suspect.

"And let me add, keep away from me, for your own sake. Keep away from Vedia and Tanno and Agathemer. Do not write letters. True, Julianus has put Marcia to death and you are rid of a pertinacious and alert enemy. But he has recalled into favor most of the professional informers who flourished under Commodus and they are on the watch for victims to win them praise and rewards. Several of the exiles recalled by Pertinax have been rearrested and re-banished or even executed since Julianus came into power. Keep close and beware!"

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXVII ACCUSATION

The murder or assassination or execution of Julianus on the Kalends of June shocked Falco even more than the deaths of Commodus and Pertinax. As the June days passed I had to exercise my greatest adroitness to keep him from spending all his waking hours indoors, chiefly in moping about his collection of gems. I did pretty well with him, for I wheedled him into going to the Baths of Titus three afternoons out of four, into going out to dine one evening in three, and I even induced him to give several formal dinners, each of which was a great success.

But, if I left him to himself, I invariably found him glooming over the gems which no longer gave him any real pleasure. And I could not blame him. Indoors one felt reasonably safe in Rome that June, for no residences had been broken into anywhere in the city, though many shops had been looted and some burnt. But, in the streets, the insolence of the Praetorians was unendurable and their unbridled license and arrogance terrorized the entire population, especially the upper classes. Going anywhere in broad daylight was dangerous, even going to the Baths of Titus from the Esquiline was risky. Anyone like Falco was certain to feel safer indoors. And the tense uncertainty of those twenty-four days made everybody restless, feverish, fidgety and morose: civil war between Severus and Pescennius Niger, lord of the East, was inevitable. How Clodius Albinus, in control of Gaul, Spain and Britain, would act, was problematical. We were all keyed-up, apprehensive and wretched.

Our suspense was shorter since it turned out that Severus had made up his mind and begun to make his rapid and effective arrangements as soon as he heard of the murder of Pertinax. Pertinax was murdered on the fifth day before the Kalends of April and so swiftly travelled the imperial couriers who were his friends and who arranged to set out at once and carry Severus the news, that the first of them rode more than eight hundred miles in eight days and reached him at Caruntum in Pannonia on the Nones of April. Severus was cautious, kept secret what he had heard and moved seventy-two miles nearer Rome to Sabaria in Pannonia, where, after the news was confirmed beyond question, he harangued the soldiers and was by them saluted Emperor on the Ides of April. At once he assured himself of the support or acquiescence of his officers and won over the local authorities and garrisons all over Illyricum, Noricum and Rhaetia. Bands of his most trusted soldiers set off towards Rome by every road. He gathered his forces, made sure of their loyalty and began his march. He was already at Aquileia when the news of the death of Julianus reached him there on the Nones of June. He marched

straight to Rome and on the tenth day before the Kalends of July, the day of the summer solstice, was outside the city, accompanied by the delegation of senators who had met him at Interamnia and surrounded by the six hundred picked men who acted as his personal guards, who, it was rumored, had not taken off their corselets day nor night since they left Sabaria.

The next day, the ninth day before the Kalends of July, we heard with amazement that the Praetorians had been cowed, had surrendered their standards to Severus and had been disarmed. Certainly knots of them hung about the streets and squares, all in ordinary tunics and rain hats, shorn of their uniforms as well as of their weapons, and looking not only humbled but frightened. It was rumored that all of those directly concerned with the murder of Pertinax had been not only disarmed and stripped of their uniforms, but actually stripped naked and scourged out of the camp by the Illyrian legionaries who had surrounded and cowed them, and ordered to flee the neighborhood of Rome and never again to approach within a hundred miles of the capitol.

From noon of that day the whole city was in a ferment, preparing for the entry on the morrow of our new Emperor. This was acclaimed the most magnificent spectacle ever beheld in Rome; certainly I was never spectator of anything so impressive. The day was fair, almost cloudless, mild and warm, but pleasant with a gentle breeze. From where Falco and I viewed the procession, nearer the Forum, we gazed about on a wondrous picture: the blue sky above, under it a frame of roofs, mostly of red tiles, some of green weathered bronze among them giving variety, and here and there a temple roof of silver gleaming in the sun, not a few gilded and flashing.

As far as we could see about us every balcony was hung with tapestries gay with particolored patterns, every doorway and window was wreathed in flowers, countless braziers sent up columns of scented smoke. The streets were lined with throngs habited in togas newly whitened; spectators of both sexes, the men in white togas, their women in the brightest silks, crowded every window, loggia, balcony, roof, and other viewpoint. The chattering of the crowds ceased when the head of the procession appeared, and, in a breathless hush, we saw leading it on horseback, with two mounted aides, Flavius Juvenalis, who had been third and last Prefect of the Praetorium to Julianus and who, as an honorable gentleman and loyal official, had been confirmed and continued in this post by Severus. Behind him tramped, in serried ranks, an entire legion of the Pannonian troops, in full armor with their great shields gleaming and the sun sparkling on their gilded helmets and their spear-points.

Behind them came ten of the elephants with which Julianus, in his futile, bungling attempts at preparations for resistance, had had some of his men drill. Each now carried

in his tower eight Danubians, four tall Dacian spearmen and four Scythian archers, bow in hand, leaning over the edge of the howdah.

Behind the elephants came Norican legionaries carrying the surrendered standards of the disbanded Praetorian Guard; not held aloft, but trailed, half inverted.

Then, amid roars of cheers, came Severus himself, habited not in his general's regalia, but in the gorgeous Imperial robes, as if already in the Palace and about to give a public levee. Though thus clad as in time of peace and walking all the way on foot, he was hedged about by his faithful six hundred, every man stepping alertly, helmet-plumes waving, helmets glittering, shields gleaming, spear-points asparkle, kilt-straps flapping, scabbards clanking, a grim advertisement of irresistible power.

After this guard walked our entire Senate, and, as the Emperor and Senate acknowledged the acclamations of the onlookers, passing amid thunders of cheering, behind we saw a long serpent ribbon of Illyrian legionaries, every man fully armed and armored as for instant battle, their even tramp sounding grim and monotonous when the cheerers paused for breath, their resistless might manifest. Indubitably Rome belonged to Severus, he was our master.

Falco, hopeful, yet awed, said little. Once inside his housewalls he fled to his beloved gems and solaced himself with them till it was time for his bath, which he took in his private bathrooms. He and I dined alone and talked chiefly of our hopes of the new Emperor. Falco particularly remarked his appearance of hard commonsense, ruthless decision and flinty resolve.

Next day, soon after dawn, we heard many rumors of disorders by the Illyrian troops, of their having used temples for barracks that night, of cook-shops forced to feed them without payment, of shops plundered and pedestrians robbed. Naturally the entire household kept indoors, except such slaves as went out for fresh vegetables, fruits and fish. I solaced myself by reading the Tragedies of Ennius. I read parts of his Hector, Achilles, Neoptolemus, Ajax and Andromache, with much emotion, and especially the Bellerophon, forgetting everything else. Then I slept until late in the afternoon.

Waking I bathed unhurriedly and then went to call Falco, who liked to bathe at the last possible moment before dinner. I walked round the rear gallery of the peristyle, sure of finding him among his jewels. The door of the middle room was not shut, and barely ajar. Against the sill of the door, on the brown and white mosaic pavement of the gallery, a glint of color caught my eye. I stooped and picked up a fine uncut emerald, one of Falco's chief treasures.

A qualm of apprehension shot through me. I pushed the door, entered and swept the room with a glance. A confusion of jewel-trays cluttered the floor, no sign of Falco. Nor was he in the left-hand room, which had been similarly rifled.

But, when I turned and peered through the right-hand inner door I saw, across the marble center-table, horridly sprawled, what I instantly knew for his corpse, so unmistakably did the head hang loose, the arms dangle, the legs trail: he was manifestly a corpse, even without sight of the dagger-hilt projecting from his back.

I rushed to him and touched him.

He was yet warm, the blood still trickled from about the dagger, driven deep under the left shoulder blade, slanting upwards, the very stroke Agathemer had drilled me in early in our flight, the stroke with which I had slaughtered two of the five bullies at Nona's hut!

I plucked out the dagger, gazing at it in horror.

As I did so I heard footsteps behind me and turned to face Casperius Asellio, and Vespronius Lustralis, two of the most persistent of the toadies who hung about Falco, both of whom hated me consumedly.

In a flash I realized my situation. Had I been a freeman I should have been commiserated by all as a gentleman who had had the misfortune to find his best friend foully murdered; as a slave I would be assumed by all Rome to have been caught in the act of assassinating my kind and indulgent master; and, recalling Tanno's invectives against me at my last dinner at Villa Andivia, I knew I was liable to be tortured until I confessed my guilt!

Asellio and Lustralis flung themselves on me with execrations and their yells brought the entire household. My protestations were unheeded. No one would listen to my valet's assertion that he had found the janitor asleep in his cell and roused him just before Lustralis and Asellio reached the entrance, that he had but just finished dressing me when he went down to the vestibule. No one heeded my denials or my urgings that I could not have rifled the collection, that the looters and the murderers must be the same individuals, that I was clearly innocent. Asellio and Lustralis not merely seized me, but rained blows on me. I knew I could knock both senseless without half trying, but, in my character of effeminate oriental exquisite, I must not advertise my real strength. I struggled, but half-heartedly.

The house-boys and any of Falco's retinue who could reach me, thumped me and mauled me. I was horrified to realize all of a sudden that those who had made most of me had always envied me in secret; that, to a man, they hated me; that each and all would use every effort to ensure my ruin; that I had to face perjury, unanimous perjury, gushing from an abundant well- head of malignity, spite, and enmity. My valet alone seemed on my side, and he could assist me not at all.

I was bound with ropes knotted till my hands and feet swelled, till the cords cut into my flesh. I was abused, my clothing torn till I was half naked. I was whacked and clawed till I was bleeding in a dozen places; I was reviled, jeered at and threatened. Trussed like a fowl to be roasted, I was half hustled half dragged, almost carried, down into the courtyard. From there, after no long wait, I was haled off to the slaves' prison in the Slave-Dealers' Exchange next the Slave-Market. There I was released from my bonds, heavy shackles were riveted on my ankles and I was cast into the lower dungeon.

I had had time to tell Dromo, my faithful valet, to inform Agathemer. I knew he, in turn, would inform Tanno and Vedia. I was certain that they would do all that they could. But I dreaded that they could do nothing. I was despondent, despairing. Actually, Dromo must have been clever, prompt and judicious, and Agathemer equally quick and resourceful, with the fullest possible help from Tanno and Vedia, and they must have taxed to the utmost their influence and their means.

After a night almost sleepless I was visited at dawn by no less a person than Galen himself.

"My boy," he said, "you, are in a terrible situation and we were in a quandary how to advise you. But, after much discussion, we are agreed that you have some chance of life as Phorbas the slave, accused of murdering his master, whereas you have no chance at all as Andivius Hedulio, proscribed along with Egnatius Capito. Our new Emperor seems to feel that all enemies of former Princes are foes of his; he seems to have ordered his agents to be on the lookout for all living persons accused, relegated, or banished under Julianus, Pertinax and Commodus. Those taken in Rome have been promptly executed. By all means, whatever happens to you, whatever threatens you, give no hint that you are Andivius Hedulio. Endure what befalls and hope for life and safety and ultimate rehabilitation.

"Of course I can see you as often as I please without exciting any suspicion. You were, while yourself and prosperous, only one of my countless patients, never among those I made much of. You, as Phorbas, have been under my special care, as the darling of poor Falco, who was one of my best friends, though I had known him so short a time. My visits here cannot prejudice your welfare and may help you, even save you.

"Cheer up! Agathemer says that the real murderers are certain to betray themselves by attempting to dispose of some of the stolen gems. He is right. And he had taken measures to ensnare them. He has warned or is warning every gem-dealer in Rome, from Orontides himself down to the most disreputable scoundrel who makes a living by exchanging his cash for stolen gems. He has sent off despatches already along many postroads, by the couriers who set out at dawn, notifying all gem-dealers in the towns along these roads to be on the watch for the miscreants. He will continue this until the warning is all over Italy from Rhegium and Brundisium to the Alps, and that within a few days. Those precious gentry are certain to be nabbed either in Rome or elsewhere. Whenever they are identified and in durance it will be easy to clear you.

"Meanwhile you will be tried as a slave accused of murdering his master and the investigation will include the questioning of every slave in the house at the time of the murder. I know you are aquiver with dread of torture; there will be torture, but I assure you you will not be tortured. As much can be done today by influence and bribery as could be done under Perennis or Cleander, only it cannot be done so crudely and openly, and much else can be done openly.

"We have endeavored to arrange to have you tried by a bunch of jurymen presided over by a praetor, just as if you were a freeman, according to Hadrian's law. But Commodus had repealed all such laws mitigating the rigors of procedure in the case of slaves and Severus has not had them reenacted. So you will be tried by a magistrate, a deputy of the Prefect of the City, as slaves were tried before Hadrian's time.

"We shall have, at the trial, to cheer you up, to counsel you, and, if necessary, to intervene in your behalf, as clever an advocate as any in Rome. Keep up a good heart, and read these letters."

And he went off.

I had a proof of the truth of what he said of bribery within half an hour, for I was bathed, my hurts dressed, and I was clothed in new, clean and comfortable garments and served with abundant eatable food and good wine.

I had promptly read the letters.

Agathemer's Galen had anticipated, mostly. Besides briefly telling me of his measures for detecting the murderers, and prophesying their success, he assured me of his devotion and alertness to take advantage of any chance to help me.

Tanno pledged me his utmost efforts to assist me, and emphasized his hope that the influences which he and Vedia could enlist in my behalf and the cash at their disposal would protect me from the worst horrors of trial as a slave and would ultimately clear me and free me from danger.

Vedia wrote:

"The Leopard-Tamer's bride gives greeting to the Leopard-Tamer. Keep up your courage! Do not be despondent, but have a hopeful heart. All that gold, all that influence can do for you, shall be done. Cheer up! You will live to see yourself a free man, unsmirched by any accusation, you and I will be married and live many years of happiness afterwards: Farewell."

Investigations of murders are prompt in Rome and trials of accused slaves quickly disposed of. Before the next morning was half way to noon, on the fifth day before the Ides of July, I found myself, still shackled, but well fed and well clad, in the Basilica Sempronia, before the magistrate charged with deciding such cases. He turned out to be young Lollius Corbulo, whom I had not set eyes on until he came to know me as Phorbas, for he was an art amateur of high standing, considering his youth.

I never have discovered how much he was influenced by his natural kindliness of disposition, how much by personal regard for me, how much by Tanno, acting for himself and Vedia, whether he had been bribed or not. He, when I questioned him in after years, passed it off with a smile saying that anyone would accept a gift on condition of doing what he meant to do uninfluenced, that no one needed a gift to make him do the right thing. From Agathemer, Tanno and Vedia I have never been able to extract any admissions as to their activities in my behalf. Anyhow Corbulo gave a demonstration of the great latitude which is permitted both by law and custom to such a magistrate in such a case. He ordered my shackles removed, and, while they were being filed through, sent off three of his apparitors in charge of Dromo to fetch some of my own garments from my apartments in Falco's house.

He went about his investigation like a fair-minded man who meant to favor no one and to ferret out the exact truth.

Corbulo in his full senatorial attire, the broad crimson stripe more conspicuous than the white of his toga, sat in his chair at the center of the apse of the basilica, his apparitors behind him. In the nave of the basilica, surrounded by guards, were herded those members of Falco's retinue who had been in his house at the time of his murder. Further down the nave were many outsiders, come to listen to the trial. In the aisles were gathered hangers-on of the court. In the apse, to the left and right of the tribunal, stood

many of Falco's friends, among whom I recognized Casperius Asellio and Vespronius Lustralis. Among those on the other side of the magistrate were Tanno and Galen.

The bare, bleak interior of the ancient, old-fashioned basilica, with its blackened roof-beams, unadorned walls, Travertine columns of the severest Tuscan pattern, and plain window-lattices, made an austere setting for the trial. I saw nowhere any rack, winches, horse, or any other engine or torture; but, while Dromo was gone, four muscular court-slaves came tramping in, each supporting a pole end. The two long poles were passed through the four ear-handles of a bronze brazier all of five feet square, level full of glowing charcoal, the brilliant bed of coals radiating an intense heat perceptible as they passed near me. When they had set it down in full view of all and near the tribunal one of them shook out and folded four-thick a thin Spanish blanket of harsh wiry wool and spread the square of it by the brazier, squatting on it to tend the coals with a long-handled five pronged altar-hook.

When Dromo returned with my garments and I was clad as Phorbas, Corbulo questioned me as to when Falco had bought me, where and from whom. To my relief he did not ask me how Rufius Libo had acquired me. He did ask my age, but nothing else concerning my past. As to my life with Falco in Africa and at Rome, he questioned me closely. I told him all about Falco's character, his gem-collecting, the effect on him of the murders of Commodus and Pertinax, his forebodings and his utterances to me about his will. When he felt that he knew all I had to tell along these lines, he said:

"Now tell me your version of your master's death."

He heard me out and said:

"I believe you. You speak like a truth-teller."

He then questioned the janitor, who babbled and cringed, half unintelligibly, but stoutly denying that he had slept at his post on the seventh day before the Kalends of July.

"I am of the opinion," said Corbulo, drily, "that you are lying."

Then to his apparitors he said:

"Strip him."

The court-slave, the charcoal-tender, stood up off his folded blanket and shook it out. The janitor, stripped and bound, ankles lashed, hands trussed behind him, was haled towards the brazier. The blanket was flung round him and four apparitors lifted him as

if he had been a log and held him near the brazier, the enveloping blanket drawn tight over his left thigh and its outer underside nearest the coals, tilting him sideways to bring the soft thickness of the thigh closest to the heat. They watched the tight blanket over his thigh and moved him a little away from the brazier when the wool began to smoke.

I had never seen nor heard of this kind of torture, but it seemed effectual. The fellow writhed, groaned, squalled and protested. After Corbulo had him brought back before him he confessed that he had been asleep in his cell from some time before Falco's murder until he was aroused by Dromo, just before the arrival of Casperius and Vespronius.

One by one the other slaves were questioned. Three declared that they had seen the janitor asleep not long before they heard the alarm.

Several more testified that the janitor had often been asleep. More than half of them confirmed my story of the theft of the silver on the Nones of May. Except the janitor not one was tortured, though Corbulo threatened with torture several who hesitated in their testimony.

After the slaves Corbulo questioned Asellio and Lustralis.

Then, when they had stood aside, he gazed about at the spectators in the nave, at the crowd behind them, interested in the next case or in others to come up later, at the hangers-on in the side aisles; for a time, mute, he stared at the glowing charcoal fire in the big brazier.

When he spoke he said:

"It is my opinion that Phorbas is innocent. I have inspected the house where the murder took place. From the condition of the looted rooms it is plain that more jewelry was stolen than any one man could carry off. Manifestly two men participated in the robbery and murder and escaped with their booty, very likely the same pair who robbed Falco's triclinium on the Nones of May. The janitor's confessed delinquency explains how they entered and got away unhindered and unseen. The dead man's heirs should punish the janitor. I hold no other slave at fault. Has any man anything which he wishes to say before I pass formal judgment for official record?' Lustralis asked permission to speak and amazed me by his fluency, his ingratiating delivery, his vehemence, his ingenuity and the fantastic malignity of his contentions. Corbulo heard him out to the end, unmoving as a statue.

"You do not look like a lunatic nor act like one, Lustralis," he said, "but you talk like one. Phorbas has impressed me by every feature of his tale. He appears to have told the truth. He seems to have been a sincere friend to his late master. I cannot credit the wild suggestion that a man of his character would plot his master's death, or that a man of his intelligence, with a full knowledge of the terms of his master's will, would expose himself to suspicion by so plotting; far less that such a man as he would ignore the perils of such a crime and so desire his freedom and the legacies promised him as to league himself with two criminals, assist them to enter the house and to escape from it, and hope to come off unscathed and unsuspected and forever unbetrayed.

"But, suppose all you imagine and insinuate is true in fact. Prove it! Produce the two robbers. Prove them the robbers by recovering their booty. If they, so convicted of the robbery, are brought before me, if they accuse Phorbas of being their accomplice, if they tell a consistent and convincing tale, if any colorable motive for such association and such a crime can be alleged against Phorbas, then I'll believe him guilty, and not till then."

He eyed Lustralis, who spoke further.

"Torture Phorbas!" Corbulo cried. "Absurd! In my court I never torture men like him, any more than if they were freemen. And though it might be imperative to torture him for a confession if all the testimony pointed to his guilt, it is ridiculous to suggest torturing him merely to corroborate evidence demonstrating his innocence.

"I, hereby, officially as the representative of the Commonwealth, pronounce Phorbas cleared of all charges connected with this case. I hereby enjoin all men to assist the Republic to detect and apprehend the murderers who robbed Falco and killed him."

Lustralis and Asellio looked baffled and sour. A murmur of approval ran through the bystanders. My fellow-slaves congratulated each other and rejoiced, save only the janitor.

Galen approached me.

"Phorbas," he said, "as you are now a freeman by your late master's will, which will soon be read and its provisions put into effect, at which reading I shall be present as one of the legatees, you may now go where you like. I invite you to come with me."

I thanked Corbulo, who said:

"Don't thank me. I did just what any sane, clear-headed, fair-minded magistrate must do, affirmed the manifest truth."

Galen led me off to a modest apartment near the Carinae. I found everything prepared for my comfort, slaves to wait on me and nothing omitted. I thanked him.

"Tanno," he said, "deputed me to hire this lodging for you. He has kept in the background. These are my slaves, put at your disposal and enjoined to obey you as they would obey me in person. Keep quiet here till I can arrange for you to take possession of your legacies from Falco. I think he left you all your personal belongings and the slaves who waited on you. As soon as the necessary formalities are completed I'll send them to you.

"Do not attempt to communicate with Vedia or Tanno. Do nothing which might betray you as your actual self. Our new Emperor seems resolute to exterminate, to the last individual, all persons implicated in any conspiracy not only against Julianus or Pertinax, but against Commodus, from the date of his accession. All such persons apprehended are promptly executed. Keep quiet. Efface yourself till I give you the word. I can communicate with you freely, can see you daily, if need be, since I am one of poor Falco's heirs and was your physician during his life here in Rome. I'll do all I can for you."

He left and I bathed, ate, and slept the rest of that day and slept sound all night.

Next day passed similarly. But, early on the following day, the third day before the Kalends of July, not long after sunrise, my new valet came to me his face ashen. He babbled some unintelligible syllables and before I could comprehend him, my bedroom was entered by a Pannonian sergeant, grim as the centurions from Britain who had liberated Agathemer and me from the ergastulum at Placentia. Behind him were four legionary soldiers. I was rearrested!

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXVIII TORTURE

I was promptly haled off to the same prison where Galen had visited me three days before. There I was again deprived of my garments and clad in others, new, but of cheap material, coarse and uncomfortable. Also shackles, heavier shackles, were at once riveted on my ankles, and I was again consigned to the lower dungeon. I was, to be sure, given good and abundant food and wine not too unpalatable. Otherwise I had no indulgences and there I spent the night.

Next day, the last day of June, Galen again visited me.

"My lad," he said, "the first rule of medicine is to cheer up the patient, but I must say that your case looks grave and I have little cheer for you. I shall do my best and so will Tanno, Vedia and Agathemer. But we are all dazed. We cannot understand what has happened, nor who has brought it to pass, nor what influences are working against us.

"But someone has gotten the ear of Juvenalis or of Severus himself. It has been represented plausibly to the Prefect of the Praetorium, or perhaps even to the Emperor in person, that the courts here in Rome have fallen into a shocking state of disrepute on account of decisions in scandalous contravention of the evidence, brought about by favoritism and bribery. It has also been plausibly represented that the slave-population has little respect for the lives or property of their masters, less loyalty towards them and very little dread of punishment. Your alleged murder of poor Falco is held up as a flagrant example of the latter condition, your acquittal as an even more flagrant instance of the degradation of the courts.

"Believing that a shocking miscarriage of justice has taken place concerning an atrocious crime, the Prefect or the Prince has ordered you rearrested and retried, tomorrow, this time before Cassius Ravillanus."

I shuddered, not metaphorically, but actually. I felt cold all over, as if plunged into an icy mountain stream. Ravillanus claimed as his ancestor Cassius Ravilla and aimed at emulating him. Certainly, as a magistrate, he quite frankly talked and acted as if acquittal were a disgrace to the court, and the object of each trial not impartial justice but the conviction of the accused. He was perfectly sincere, upright in every intention, incorruptible, fanatical, self-opinionated, austere, ascetic, stern and harsh. I shuddered again and again at the thought of him.

"Ravillanus has the reputation of being unbribeable," Galen went on, 'and it is a question whether an attempt at bribery might not prejudice your case more than letting matters be. Yet I have employed an agent far too clever to bungle any approach, and something may be done for you. Vedia is despondent, but resolute to keep her head and help you all she can, and she has cash to spare and much influence. Tanno has even more of both. Agathemer is hopeful of running down the real murderers, as they are loaded with their booty. If they are caught we can clear you.

"Keep up a brave heart."

I tried to, but it was impossible. I ate little and slept hardly at all.

The next day, the Kalends of July, saw me haled again to the Basilica Sempronia.

There I beheld a scene almost a duplicate of my first trial; a similar throng of spectators, very similar bevvies of expectant witnesses, advocates and prosecutors; the same batch of my former fellow-slaves, surrounded by the same guards; the very same charcoal-brazier tended by the same slave squatting on the same folded blanket; similar knots of notables in the apse, about and behind the magistrate's tribunal; the same carved arm-chair; in it not Corbulo, but Cassius Ravillanus, lean, dry, tanned, leathery, smooth-shaven, bald and stern.

He glared at me when my guards halted me four yards or so in front of him; then he beckoned to one of his apparitors and spoke to him in an undertone. The fellow went off as if on an errand.

Ravillanus then gave, even more positively than Corbulo, a demonstration of the great latitude permitted such a magistrate in procedure, of how completely it lies within his discretion what to do and how to do it.

"Fellow!" he ranted, "you have plotted to rob and murder your master, you have done both and you have, by favor and influence and perhaps even by bribery, arranged for your easy acquittal. I am charged by the Prince of the Republic to see to it, that the majesty of the law, the sacredness of the lives of Roman noblemen, and the security of their property be publicly vindicated: I am here to undo all that Lollius Corbulo supinely allowed to be done. You shall perceive that I am wholly unlike any such trifler. Of one feature only of his procedure do I approve. I highly acclaim his notions as to the right kind of torture. Slaves like you, however pampered, are property, like horses or cattle. Their value lies in their usefulness. Any slave, after torture, should be as useful to his owners as before. If a slave is placed upon the horse and weights hung to his feet, his

legs are often made helpless, he cannot ever walk again, he is a cripple. Still oftener does the rack leave a slave utterly useless. Our courts have always desired some form of torture by which the recalcitrant could be made to suffer acute pain, but not in any way injured. Lollius has introduced a torture which never injures anyone subjected to it, but which causes extreme agony while in use. Only stretch a hard-yarn Spanish blanket over a thigh, draw it tight and hold the thigh at just the right distance from just the right size of brazier with its coals properly tended, and the subject can be made to tell the truth; but not broiled alive, for the blanket will singe before the flesh under it cooks. You had best tell the truth, not such an ingenious string of lies as you told before Lollius."

Then he had all my fellow-slaves brought up and ranged before him.

"Your master," he said, "has been foully done to death. If the guilt of this hideous crime can be indubitably fastened upon one of you or two or any few, the rest of you shall be held innocent and shall suffer no penalties. If no facts can be ascertained limiting the guilt to some of you, all of you, according to the ancient law concerning such cases, shall be put to death by crucifixion or exposure to the beasts in the arena, as our Prince may prefer. I have no desire to send to death any guiltless man. I enjoin you all to tell the truth and to assist the law. The truth-tellers will suffer less of the torture."

He then, beginning with the scullions, had every boy and man tortured over the brazier, asking no question of any till he had felt the heat of the fire and had begun to yell for mercy. Then he would interrupt the torture, question the victim, bid the torturers again hold their subject close to the fire; and again suspend the torture and ask questions. Naturally the victims, frantic with pain and terror, said whatever they thought would get them off.

Also, to my horror, I realized for the first time, what I had only vaguely suspected before, how venomously they had envied me, how violently embittered most of them were against me, how they had hated their master's favorite. They were glad to slander me, they enjoyed assisting at my ruin, they relished the prospect of my being tortured and executed. Moreover it appeared that they had been carefully coached in what they were to say or had agreed among themselves, without any outside hints, or after such hints.

The whole household made it appear that they had always suspected me of desiring Falco's death in order that I might gain my freedom and enjoy his promised legacies; that I had enticed and wheedled him into leaving me in his will an absurdly large share of his property.

They were also unanimous in declaring that they had been unable to bring home to me the devising of the robbery of the triclinium, but they had all felt certain from the first

that I had arranged to have confederates of mine steal the table silver. They were equally consistent in asserting that they all believed that I had murdered Falco, after arranging for the looting of the gem-collection as a blind.

Hour after hour I had to stand and watch wretch after wretch held to the glowing coals, had to listen to the shrieks of the victims, could not but realize that Ravillanus was bent on my conviction, that nothing would swerve him from his purpose.

Dromo, alone of all the household, alone of my obsequious, indulged personal servants, held out against the torture and though he writhed, yelled, sobbed and even endured the pain until he fainted more than once, refused to say anything against me.

After Dromo my turn came. When I was stripped Ravillanus rubbed his hands and remarked:

"You have your character written on your back! How could Falco trust a fellow so branded and scarred! Easy-going masters like Falco not only bring on their own deaths, but sap the foundations of safety for all slave-owners. Your back, in advance, advertises you guilty. Better own up."

I pass over the details. But I must confess that I was far from heroic. Perhaps it is true, and not an invention, that Marcus Scaevola voluntarily thrust his hand into the altar-fire and stood mute and smiling, and watched it burn and char. If any man ever did that he had more self-control than I ever had. I could repress every indication of my agonies. I fainted so many times that I lost count. The afternoon was drawing on towards evening before Ravillanus began to lose patience.

Tanno and Galen had been from the first among those about the tribunal. Now, in a pause, while I was being brought back to consciousness to be again tortured, Galen succeeded in gaining the attention of Ravillanus enough to induce him, though grudgingly, to permit the celebrated advocate, Memmius Tuditanus, whom they had brought with them, to speak in my behalf. I had regained consciousness before he began to speak and heard most of what he said. He spoke well.

His chief point was that a gem-expert and art-amateur like me, knowing that he was to inherit one of the finest and most carefully chosen collections of gems and art objects in all the world, would be the last man on earth to allow it to be disturbed, let alone to plot its ransacking, the pillage of its cases and the dispersal of their precious contents. No man could better have exposed the absurdity of the whole flimsy and preposterous fabrication that I had had two confederates, who had, in my interest and at my

suggestion, robbed first the triclinium and then the gem-collection, after which last I had myself murdered Falco.

But his logic, his lucidity and his eloquence fell on deaf ears. Ravillanus was unmoved. He permitted Lustralis to make a rambling and incoherent harangue, setting forth his ridiculous contentions.

Then he passed judgment:

"I hold you all innocent save Phorbas alone. Dromo is manifestly devoted to Phorbas and has lied in his behalf. But Dromo, apparently, was no accomplice in the plot or in the murder. I acquit him with the rest. Phorbas, who vilely plotted against his master, who foully murdered him, I adjudge guilty of his death and I hereby condemn him to be kept chained in the slaves' prison until the next day of beast-fighting in the Colosseum, then, in the arena, to be exposed to the ferocity of the famished wild beasts of the desert, wilderness and forest, by them to be lacerated and torn to pieces, as he richly deserves."

Tanno and Galen could indicate their grief and sympathy only by looks and gestures, for they dared not attempt to approach me.

Then Ravillanus called:

"Where is that barber?"

The apparitor who had gone off before the trial began produced a barber.

"Trim his hair and beard!" Ravillanus ordered. And I had to submit to having my long locks shorn and my beard clipped close, leaving me far too like my true former self for my comfort, since I still had hopes of Agathemer catching the real murderers in time to save me from the doom impending over me because of the fanaticism of Ravillanus, while I anticipated nothing but inescapable death should I be recognized as not Phorbas, but as Andivius Hedulio.

I was then, late in the afternoon of the Kalends of July, haled off to the Colosseum and immured in one of the cells of the lowermost crypt, far below the street level. To my amazement I found myself sharing the cell with Narcissus, who had been similarly condemned to exposure to the beasts, as the murderer of Commodus.

Together we spent five dreadful days in the darkness, dampness, chill and foulness of that tiny cell. I found that influence such as Tanno and Vedia possessed and cash such as they had at their disposal, could do much even for the occupant of such a cell,

destined to such a doom. I was visited by Galen, more than once, and he emphasized the still hopeful possibility, nay probability, that Agathemer might, in time, save me, run down and bring before a magistrate the real murderers. I was gloomy, I admit. But his presence in that horrible hole and his words cheered me, by brightening the hope I had never wholly lost.

Also I was tended, massaged, rubbed, chafed, washed each day in warm water brought in big pails and poured into a big, shallow pan; I was anointed; clothed in a comfortable tunic, strengthened with plenty of good food and strong wine and provided with a cot and bedding and blankets. I was able to have Narcissus indulged also, in order that he might be a less unpleasant cell-mate.

He talked to me freely of life in the Palace, of Commodus, of Marcia, of Ducconius Furfur, of his own fatal mistake, of the amazing likeness, even apparent identity, between Furfur and Commodus, of the naturalness of his inability to tell them apart.

I drank and ate all the food and wine I could swallow, slept all I could, and tried to be hopeful.

Thus passed five horrible days and six hideous nights.

After no more than twelve days, as I learned later, Severus felt himself securely established as Prince of the Republic. By spending almost every moment of daylight on official business, denying himself more than the merest minimum of sleep and food, he had put every department of the government sufficiently in order to feel assured of their smooth and effective operation. His troops were now all outside the City, comfortably camped, well supplied and content; the City was orderly and its life had resumed its normal aspect and activities. He felt free to win the regard of the populace by magnificent exhibitions in the amphitheater, on the occasion of the eight days of the Games of Apollo, beginning the day before the Nones of July.

Early next day Narcissus and I were haled from our cell and led, by passages only too well known to me since my service in the Choragium, to the iron-gated doorway from which condemned criminals were thrust out into the arena for the lions or other beasts to tear. From inside that doorway I could look across the sand of the arena and could see not only the herald on his tiny platform, elevated above the leap of the most agile panther, not only the arena-wall opposite me, but also the faces of the senators in their private boxes on the podium, even a portion of the nobility behind them and of the populace higher up and further back.

The day was hot, still and clear, and the July sunshine, still slant in the early morning, struck under the awning and long shafts of the mellow radiance brightened the sand.

From that doorway, craning over the heads of the wretches in front of me, I caught glimpses of the fury of several beasts as they vented their ferocity upon some ordinary criminals and assuaged their ravenous hunger on their blood and flesh.

My time was not far off, yet I still hoped against hope that Agathemer might, even yet, have caught the thieving murderers and would intervene before it was too late. I did not at all fear the beasts; I knew that no bear, panther, leopard, tiger or lion would hurt me, but I felt certain that, when the beasts left me unharmed, I should be recognized as Festus the Beast-Wizard: and then, as the scrutiny of the whole audience would be riveted on me, identified as Andivius Hedulio.

Narcissus was led out, stepping jauntily between his guards, treading springily, with no sign of panic or dejection, a pattern Hercules, naked save for a loin-cloth, his skin pink and fresh, in spite of his days in a dungeon, his mighty muscles rippling all over his huge form. The herald proclaimed to all that this was Narcissus, professional wrestler, for long the crony of Commodus, who had strangled his master and was to be punished for his treachery and crime by being torn to pieces in sight of all Rome.

They let out on him a full-grown, young Mauretanian lion, starved and ravenous. Narcissus was naked and empty-handed, his close-clipped hair, standing like the bristles of a brush, yellow as gold wire, shining in the sun. He stood almost as immobile as had Palus and faced the lion, which, after a bound or two towards him, flattened down on the sand and began to crawl nearer, preparing for a spring.

When it sprang Narcissus performed one of the most miraculous feats ever beheld in the amphitheater. He did not dodge but ducked slightly, the wide-spread, taloned paws missing his head on each side. His arms shot out as the lion sprang, and, though the brute came at him through the air like a log-arrow from a catapult, his hands gripped each side of the wide-open mouth and his thumbs pushed the inner corners of the lips between the parted upper and lower cheek-teeth. Therefore to close his jaws on his victim the lion had to crush a roll or fold of his own lips. This incredibly difficult feat prolonged his life a few breaths. The whole populace howled in ecstasy at the wretch's coolness, courage, strength, swiftness and adroitness.

The lion's momentum and weight bore Narcissus to the ground, but his thumbs did not slip nor his hold loosen. On the sand lion and man rolled and wrestled, for a brief time. Then the lion, lashing out with his hind legs, caught with the claws of one the wrestler's

belly and half disemboweled him. Narcissus collapsed and the great fangs met in his throat.

The populace redoubled their yells.

When silence fell, after the lion had been chased back into his cage and the cage lowered down the lift-shaft, after the mangled corpse of Narcissus had been dragged away and sand sprinkled to hide the red patches where his blood had soaked it, I was haled forth and stood in the very center of the arena. From his perch the herald proclaimed that I was Phorbas, the slave of Pompeianus Falco of Carthage and Rome, who had plotted his master's death in order sooner to gain freedom from his testament, and had himself dealt Falco his deathblow. The populace jeered and booed at me.

I had, as Festus the Animal-Tender, often viewed the interior of the Colosseum from the arena. But never when I was myself the cynosure of all eyes. There I stood, naked except for a loin-cloth, empty-handed, my shoulder-brand and scarred back visible to half the spectators, glared at and reviled. From my viewpoint the spectacle was singularly magnificent: the dark blue sky overhead, varied by some large, solid-looking, white clouds; the fluttering banners waving from the awning poles; the particolored, sagging awning, shading half the audience; the beauty of the upper colonnade under the awning; the solidly packed throng of spectators which crowded the colonnade, the aisles, the steps and every seat in the hollow of the amphitheater; the dignified ease of the nobility in their spaced chairs, of the senators in their ample armchairs; the gorgeousness of the Imperial Pavilion, filled with a retinue brilliant in blue and silver, in green and gold, in white and crimson, about the hard, spare, soldierly figure on the throne.

I was the only human being on the sand, eyed by all onlookers.

From a door in the podium-wall a famished lion was loosed at me. He bounded towards me, roaring; but, three or four lengths from me he paused, stood still regarding me, circled about me and then turned his back on me and loped off to the arena-wall, along which he rounded the arena, apparently searching for a way out. The populace, at first mute with astonishment, voiced their amazement in yells of a notably different quality from those they had uttered while watching Narcissus.

Another lion behaved similarly, except that he, after inspecting me, merely walked in circles far out in the arena, ignoring me as if I were not there at all.

They loosed on me five more lions, four tigers, four leopards, four panthers and four bears, of the fierce Alpine breed. Some of these animals delighted the populace by

attacking each other and affording entertainment by savage and ferocious fighting. But not one showed any disposition to attack me.

As beast after beast approached me, coned me and spared me, the upper tiers began to call:

"He is innocent."

"He is guiltless."

"The beasts know."

"He is not guilty."

"The gods declare him clean of guilt!" and other such cries.

Also they began to show signs of being restless and bored. Some yelled for another criminal.

A seventh lion was loosed at me. He paused like the others and eyed me; then he strolled up to me, snuffed at me, and rubbed his mane against my hip, emitting a rambling purr. I laid my hand on his mane.

Instantly, from all sides at once, rang out cries of,

"Festus!"

"Festus the Beast-Wizard!"

"He's no Phorbas, he's Festus come back!"

I was not far from the Imperial Pavilion and one of the retinue leaned over the podium-coping and called to me. I walked towards him. When I was within earshot he called in Greek:

"The King commands that you lead the beasts back to their cages."

Elated and hoping for a reprieve, for vindication, for life, for rehabilitation, for Imperial favor, I led beast after beast back to its cage on a shaft-lift, or to a door in the wall. When the last one was caged an officer of the Imperial retinue, a frontiersman only lately come to Rome, stepped out of one of the postern doors, two arena-slaves with him. They led

me to the center of the arena, trussed my hands behind me, bound my ankles and wrapped round my head an evil-smelling old quilt, probably taken from the cot of some arena-slave housed in some cell under the hollow of the amphitheater. Half suffocated by it, unable to shake it off, for they tied it fast, I stood there, blind, realizing that the Emperor still believed me guilty, was inexorable and meant me to be torn to pieces then and there; believing, as I did, that my immunity from attack was due to the effect of my gaze on the beasts I made mild.

Now you, who read, know that I was not devoured. But I had no shred of hope left. I thought that my end had come. I anticipated only the agony of great fangs rending my flesh.

I felt only the hot breath of a beast snuffing at my legs. Perhaps I fainted. Certainly my next sensation was of lying on the sand, with several unseen animals growling near me and one or more snuffing at my feet and legs.

The amphitheater was quiet, even hushed.

Then, suddenly, a lion uttered a full-throated, coughing roar, jagged and rumbling. When it died away a universal yell arose from the populace. I heard cries of:

"He is innocent!"

"Set him free!"

"We behold the justice of the gods!"

"This proves him guiltless!"

"Festus or Phorbas, he is not guilty!"

And other such exclamations.

Ridiculously, what passed through my mind, besides disgust at the foul odor of the quilt about my head, was the thought that, if I had known that ferocious beasts would avoid me even when they could not see my gaze, I should, on that unforgettable moonlit evening in Sabinum, have gone off home to my cottage, to Septima, and have missed my encounter with Vedia, and our night in her traveling coach.

Then I heard the voices of the animal-tenders essaying, with their long-handled tridents, to chase back into their cages the beasts loose about me.

Soon someone cut my ankle-thongs and the cords about the quilt, also my arm-thongs. The quilt was twitched from my face and I was assisted to my feet. The amphitheater was full of the yells of the populace, affirming my innocence and the manifest intervention of the gods in my behalf. I rolled my gaze around the audience and sought to interpret the demeanor of the Imperial retinue.

Then, as I gazed at the Emperor, too far off for me to make out his expression, the yells altered their quality.

I turned round.

I saw, running towards me across the sand, Agathemer!

Behind him was an official in the robes of a magistrate!

Behind him six more human shapes, four lictors conveying two bound prisoners.

Agathemer embraced me and I him.

"Saved," he breathed, "we've got 'em and most of the loot. Enough to convict 'em and clear you!"

As we loosed our embrace I looked at the approaching magistrate.

He was Flavius Clemens!

Before the shock of recognizing him had passed I forgot him entirely.

For I had recognized the two prisoners.

Though I had seen them but once and that by moonlight, and that eight years before, I recognized the two drunken robbers who had helped us to our couriers' equipment and sent us off galloping to Marseilles.

Indubitably they were Carex and Junco!

While still numb with amazement I felt upon me the cold gaze of Flavius Clemens. I looked him full in the face. He was no less astonished than I and I could read in his expression both amazement and suspicion. I was acutely aware that Ravillanus, by having my hair and beard clipped, had made me readily recognizable to anyone and

everyone who had known me in the days of my prosperity. I was even more acutely aware of the keen intuition which every lover feels toward any actual or potential rival. I dreaded that Clemens not only recognized me for myself, but had a glimmering inkling as to why his suit of Vedia had twice failed. But he said nothing except:

"You are cleared of every imputation in connection with the murder of Pompeianus Falco. You are free to go where you please."

Agathemer took off his robe, and threw it around me and led me to a postern. In the vaulted corridor we were met by Tanno, who embraced me and congratulated me, and Galen, who also embraced me and felicitated me. Tanno said:

"Vedia kept up till Agathemer nabbed the criminals, then she fainted; but she declares the faint relieved her and that she is entirely herself."

In one of the cells under the hollow of the amphitheater I was given strong wine, all I wanted, and then washed with warm water already prepared for me, and afterwards thoroughly massaged. Then I was clad in garments of my own.

"I feel like myself," I remarked.

Just then Flavius Clemens entered, his expression entirely too intelligible for me. Looking me full in the eyes he said:

"You have been passing as an art-amateur of Greek ancestry, under the name of Phorbas, with the status of a slave. Before that you were among the helpers at the Choragium, held as a slave belonging to the fiscus, by the name of Festus. It seems to me that you are no Greek, nor of Greek blood, even to the smallest degree, I take you for a full-blooded Roman. I think I recognize you. Are you not Andivius Hedulio?"

"I am," I acknowledged.

He saluted me courteously and bade me a polite farewell, without any other word.

Tanno and Galen made no comment, nor did Agathemer. They assisted me out to Tanno's waiting litter. In it I was borne off to the lodgings which I had occupied eight days before, between my two trials. There I found a tempting meal ready for me and ate liberally. Then I was put to bed and at once fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion and slept through till long after daylight next day.

When I woke I found that Dromo himself was by my bedside, as well as Agathemer. They tended me, washed me, plied me with wine and fed me with dainties, asserting that Galen had given orders that I was on no account to stir from my bed or sit up in it.

I slept again and, when I woke early in the afternoon, insisted on getting up and being dressed. I was no sooner clad than there entered the apartment a big, florid, youthful Pannonian sergeant and four legionaries.

I was yet again rearrested!

They led me away, forbidding Agathemer to exchange a word with me, or to follow us. Through the brilliant July sunlight they led me, along its northeast flank, up the Steps of Groaning, and to the Mamertine Prison!

There I was handed over to four of the assistants to the Public Executioner. They stripped me of my outer garments, leaving me naked except for my tunic. Then they haled me to the trap-door, lifted the trap, passed ropes under my armpits and lowered me into the dreaded lower dungeon, the horrible Tullianum!

ANDIVIUS HEDULIO VOL.IV BY EDWARD LUCAS WHITE

CHAPTER XXXIX THE TULLIANUM

Gloomy as is the upper cell of the Mamertine Prison there is light enough there for my eyes to have been utterly blinded by it as I was lowered into the black pit beneath. I saw nothing in the brief period while I was being let down, while the ropes were being drawn up, while the trap-door was shut down and fitted into place. Then I was in the pitchest darkness, into which no ray, no glimmer of light could penetrate. I saw nothing whatever, yet I seemed to feel a presence, seemed to hear a faint footfall, seemed to be aware of another human being standing close to me. Then I heard a deep, resonant, healthy, pleasant-sounding voice ask:

"Brother in misfortune, who are you?"

I was past any impulse towards dissimulation or any belief in its utility.

"I am Andivius Hedulio."

"You are?" the big, cheerful male voice exclaimed. "You really are? You amaze me! I am Galvius Crispinillus, lately and for many a year King of the Highwaymen! Give me your hand!"

Now, whatever distaste I felt for giving my hand to such a criminal, however great was my repugnance, however utterly I felt myself lost, however certain I was of the inevitable doom hanging over me, however short a respite I anticipated before my inescapable death, I was not fool enough to antagonize my companion in misery, presumably a powerful and ferocious brute. I held out my hand. His grasped it. Mine returned the grip.

"Come this way!" he said. "This pit is damp and chilly, but even here a bed of stale straw is better than the rock floor or the patches of mud on it or the heaps of filth. I know every inch of this hole and I know the least uncomfortable place to sit. Come along!"

He guided me in the utter blackness to a pile of damp straw. On it we sat down, half reclining.

"If you are thirsty," he said, "I can guide you to the well. There is a spring in here and plenty of good water."

"I thank you," I said. "I shall be thirsty enough before long. Just now I am far more interested to hear how you came here. Nobody believed that you would ever be caught."

"No more did I!" he ejaculated. "I had so easily defied the utmost efforts of the government and officials under Aurelius, of the incompetents under Commodus, of his vaunted Highway Constabulary; had so prospered, had so come and gone as I pleased and robbed whom I pleased from the Po to the Straits, that I thought no man could lay for me any snare I could not foresee, thought myself impeccably wary and prescient, though I had always taken and would always take all necessary precautions."

"But I was a fool. I comprehended Aurelius and Commodus and their magistrates and officials and constabulary; I was right in fearing nothing from Pertinax and Julianus; but I was an ass to think I could cope with Septimius Severus. That man is deeper than the deepest abyss of mid-ocean!"

"I thought I was certain of months of disorder, confusion and laxity in which I could go where I pleased, act as I pleased, garner a rich harvest and escape unscathed. Do you know, before he had left Aquileia, perhaps before he had passed the Alps, possibly before he had set out from Sabaria, that man had despatched not one but a dozen detachments to ascertain my whereabouts, consider how best to take me unawares, lie in wait for me, nab me and hunt down my bands. I believe he had thought out, far back in that head of his, long before Pertinax was murdered, perhaps even long before Commodus died, every measure he would initiate if he became Emperor, down to the smallest detail. He had all his plans framed and thought out, I'll wager!"

"His emissaries were no fools! They, first among those despatched against me, knew their business. I was trapped near Sentinum, on the Kalends of this month. Never mind how; even in this plight I'm ashamed of it. They just missed nabbing Felix Bulla along with me. But he got away that time. And I prophesy that now he is warned of his danger and knows the cleverness of the men on his trail, he'll show himself yet cleverer. He is a marvel, is Felix Bulla, and promises to outdo even my record."

He broke off, breathing audibly.

"By the way," he went on, "are you hungry? I have part of a loaf of bread in here, not yet stale and no damper than it must get in this foul air. It hasn't fallen on the floor. It's eatable."

"I'll be hungry enough before long," I replied, "but I am not hungry now. I had eaten all I wanted and of the best just before I was haled here."

"Speak when you want any," he said. "It will be share and share alike here for us till they come to finish us.

"And now, tell me about yourself. I have always been curious about you. I heard all about you when you first got into trouble and I was told that the official report of your death was fictitious, invented by underlings too clumsy to capture you and fearful of the consequences of their incompetence. Also I heard unimpeachable testimony that you were alive later and had been seen in Rome with Maternus and outside Rome, the next summer, with the mutineers from Britain. I have often wondered how you got into such company. Tell me how you came to be with Maternus."

I saw no utility in any further dissimulation of anything or in any reticence; I began with our springtime stay at the farm in the mountains, and told my story in detail, from that hour.

When I came to my visit, along with Maternus, to the Temple of Mercury and mentioned how Maternus had warned me that we were being watched, and how I had shot one glance towards the watchers and had recognized one of them, he interrupted me and, without enquiring where I had seen him before, asked for a description of the watcher I had recognized. I gave it as well as I could and he said:

"That was my brother, Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, now dead. It was he who told me that he had seen you with Maternus. Go on."

Again, when I spoke of recognizing Crispinillus by the wayside as I passed with the mutineers he interjected:

"Yes, he told me he saw you there."

And later, when I spoke of being found with Agathemer after the massacre, separated from him and led off to the ergastulum at Nuceria he remarked:

"I can't conceive how my brother missed you. Nor could he. He looked for you among the corpses and went over the survivors twice in search of you."

"I did not see him after the massacre," I declared.

"Mercury protected you," was his comment.

When I finished the story of my giving warning of the plot in the ergastulum at Nuceria I paused.

"Go on, lad!" he urged. "You have had adventures and you narrate them tellingly."

I hesitated and then, utterly reckless, I blurted out:

"If I am to go on with my story you might as well know right now, that I am not only Andivius Hedulio, but also Felix the Horse-Wrangler."

He swore a great oath.

"Boy!" he cried, "I love you! I have admired you since I listened to Bulla's account of his one failure. At first I was furious at your having spoiled the best plan I ever laid and the most brilliant chance I ever had, at your preventing me from making the biggest haul of booty I ever had hopes of. But, as years passed, my resentment has abated and my admiration has warmed. I bear you no grudge. I have often thought I should like to meet you and find out why on earth you desired to thwart me and how you managed to do it. Go on! Tell me the rest."

I resumed my tale.

When I came to my outlook from the crag and explained my former acquaintance with Vedia he interrupted.

"Of course, if you knew the lady and she was an old flame of yours, I don't wonder that you intervened to save her. My lads were so rough and fierce-looking that they had a worse reputation than they deserved. When they captured prisoners rich enough to pay any profitable ransom they treated them with the most scrupulous deference. Business is business and we were not brigands for fun, but for profit. Also they all dreaded me and my orders were explicit and emphatic. Your sweetheart would have been as respected with them as in her own home. But, of course, you couldn't feel that way. Go on with your story."

I demurred, asserting that I felt sleepy. He assented and we composed ourselves on the straw. How long I slept or when I wakened I do not know: I was roused by the opening of the trap-door and by the light which entered from above. Food was lowered to us; pork-stew, still warm, in a two-handled, wide-mouthed jug; bread; olives, not wholly spoiled; and a small kidskin of thin, sour wine. Galvius received the dole and safeguarded the containers: the ropes were drawn up, the trap-door reset and we were again in utter darkness.

To my astonishment I felt entirely myself and very hungry. We drank and ate deliberately and again drank. Galvius was a careful husbender of the wine, and we drank mostly water from the spring.

Afterwards, nestled in the not unendurably damp straw, chilly, but not shivering, we sat or lay side by side and he urged me to continue my story. I began where I had left off, and, going into the smallest details, brought my history down to the hour of my consignment to our dungeon.

When I paused he sighed, but not gloomily.

"You have had marvellous adventures," he said, "and marvellous luck, both good and bad. I knew that Marcia had belonged to your uncle. I was informed of the existence of Ducconius Furfur, of his likeness to Commodus, of his presence in the Palace, of his utilization as a dummy Emperor, to set Commodus free to masquerade as Palus, and I heard that he had been your neighbor.

"Now go back, begin your tale at the beginning. Tell me of your getting into trouble at the first, of how you escaped in the first place. I have often wondered how you managed it."

"Give me a respite," I demurred, "my voice is tired. It is your turn to talk. Tell me how you learned about Ducconius Furfur and about Commodus masquerading as Palus and about Marcia."

"Why," he said, "I had friends in one or more towns when I first took to the woods. They gave me tips that helped me to make fine hauls on the highways. As I prospered I made more friends; they helped me and my growing success gained more, till I had friends in every town in Italy and in Rome itself and an organized service of road-messengers. Why, Imperial couriers often carried letters and packets, destined for me, from one town to another, or even carried onward letters from me to distant friends or parcels of my booty.

"In Rome itself I had many agents and chiefly my sister, Galvia Crispinilla, a professional procuress and poisoner, who knew the worst secrets of the lives of all Rome's wealthy and noble debauchees, and our brother, Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, a professional informer and a valued member of the Imperial Secret Service. I never knew why he had a spite against you, but he had and it was false information given by him that caused your proscription and ruin and thrust you into your years of misery. I always felt that you did not deserve what you have suffered, but his grudges were none of my business.

"He is dead, as is Galvia, for she kept poison about her and gave a supply to him and to me to use in case of capture. I was caught without mine, for I was certain that no danger threatened me. He and she took the poison when they saw capture inevitable, as it will be for most evil-doers all over the Empire under the sway of such a man as Septimius Severus."

He paused and I meditated awhile, puzzling as to how I could have incurred the vindictive rancor of any secret-service agent.

Presently I said:

"Tell me how you came to be King of the Highwaymen."

"My boy," he said, "my case is far different from yours. You had an honorable origin and an honorable past. Nor were any of your adventures discreditable to you, even if some situations you have been in were distressing then and are humiliating to remember. You have nothing to be ashamed of unless it be such a trifling peccadillo as impersonating Salsonius Salinator.

"My origin I shall never disclose, not even to a brother in misfortune. My life has been one long series of perjuries, murders, robberies, debaucheries and ruthless cruelties. I have been deaf to all considerations of decency, pity and mercy; as unmoved by such feelings as will be the savage beasts which spared you but will rend me to shreds. I am at the end of my crimes; let me hide them. My doom is at hand. Why should I defile your ears with the tale of my atrocities? Let them remain untold."

"You slander yourself," I demurred. "You cannot make me believe that a man capable of condoning my balking of your great coup on the Flaminian Highway, capable of guiding me to this bed of straw and of offering me a share of his bit of stale bread can be all bad. There must be much in your past life less dark than you indicate."

He ruminated.

"Frankly," he said, "I cannot recall anything I ever did at which a man like you would not shudder. I have been a good sport, that is why I could not but chuckle, after my first wrath cooled, at your spoiling my great coup, as you call it. But, all my life, I have gloried in my treacheries and cruelties. I have hated all mankind and been merciless to foes, if they came into my power, and have pretended friendliness I did not feel so as to make use of those who thought me friendly.

"I can well recall only one human being I really loved: my wife. She had her weak points, for she was a despiser of the gods, mocking all religion and addicted to some contemptible Syrian cult of superstition and puerilities. But I loved her in spite of that failing, for, in every other way, she was a paragon. She is dead now and spared the agonies she would have suffered at my capture and fate. Our two daughters are safe; both healthy, both with the full status of citizens of the Republic, both well provided with possessions, each married to a good, reliable husband, though the younger is almost too young to be a wife. I feel at peace about them.

"I really loved my wife and in a way, her two girls. But, except for them, I have cheated, ensnared, robbed and killed without pity or remorse."

"You have no regrets?" I queried.

"No remorse," he corrected me. "I should do it all over again if I were back as I was when I took to brigandage.

"Of course, while my wife was alive and I hoped for an old age with her, I had a dream of investing my savings in a house in some out-of-the-way town and in an estate near it and living at ease on the proceeds of my robberies. But that was always far off in the future; I laid up a hoard to make it possible, but I was never anywhere near ready to make use of that hoard. Now it has been divided between my daughters, for, after their mother's death, I realized that no life but brigandage was possible for me. If I had not been captured I should have gone on as I was, I should go on now, could I escape and resume my old life. I feel no remorse.

"But I confess to one regret. I have, all my life, requited every helper and paid off every grudge. But one benefactor, my greatest benefactor, I have not repaid, although, when I learned of his inestimable service to me, I swore a great oath to requite him, if it ever was in my power. I have never been able to learn who he was, or even whether he is yet living. If he is, I hate to die without requiting him as he deserves, in so far as I might.

"And I own that I was and am keenly curious to learn who he was. The mere curiosity gnaws at me. Perhaps you understand."

"I do," I said. "I also am extremely curious about a mystery I encountered in the earlier part of my adventures. That memory urges me to comply with your request for the former half of my story."

And, beginning with my uncle's death, I narrated all my earlier adventures. When I told of the cloaked and hatted horseman by the roadside in the rain, the day of the brawl in Vediumnum and the affray near Villa Satronia, he cut in with:

"That was my brother, Marcus. He was detailed to report on your local feud. Whether he knew of you before that, whether his queer spite against you originated then or earlier, I don't know. He took dislikes and likes without any traceable reasons."

Similarly, when I told of seeing Marcus Crispinillus peer through the postern door of Nemestronia's water-garden he interjected some remarks.

He uttered admiring ejaculations as I told of wrestling with the leopard on the terrace at Nemestronia's and of how Agathemer and I crawled through the drain at Villa Andivia, also at my tale of my branding and scourging and of the loyalty of Chryseros Philargyrus.

But, when I came to our discovery of the hut in the mountains, he stirred uneasily in the rustling straw and muttered in his throat. As I described our winter at the hut he became more and more excited, uttering ejaculations, half suppressed at first, as if not to interrupt my narrative, later louder and louder.

When I told of our killing the five ruffians he sprang up.

"Say no more!" he cried. "Come to my arms. Let me embrace you! Let me clasp you close! You are he! You are my benefactor! The man who tells that story in such detail cannot have heard it from another, he must have lived it! To think that you are Felix the Horse-Master and also Andivius Hedulio and that you saved my Nona! My gratitude cannot be expressed, any more than your service to me can be requited. But I shall do all I can. The gems you took were but a trifle and you were welcome to them. In fact, I never missed them. In any case they were but an installment on what you deserved and now deserve. It is not yet too late for me to save you. I can cause your speedy release and probably your complete rehabilitation. They have been keeping me here in the hope of extorting from me information which would enable them to ferret out my confederates in the towns and cities. They have wheedled and threatened, but have hesitated to torture me, since no one doubts that I was, by origin, a freeman. I have held out and should have held out, even if tortured. Now I'll make a voluntary confession, enough to delight the magistrates. Chiefly I'll emphasize your complete innocence and my brother's malignity. I'll have to save some others along with you and I shall. But, to a certainty, I'll save you!

"It seems to me there is a poplar-pole somewhere in this dungeon."

He felt about and presently I heard a dull thumping, on the trap-door, in a sort of rhythm, like the foot-beating of spectators at Oscan dances. After no long interval the trapdoor was lifted; Crispinillus called up:

"Tell them I have changed my mind. I'll confess. I'll make a full confession. I'll tell the whole story!"

The trap-door was replaced and we were again in complete darkness.

He settled himself beside me in the straw.

"No need to husband our provisions now," he said. "Neither of us will be left long in this hole. Let's comfort ourselves with food and wine."

I felt inclined the same way and we munched and passed the kidskin back and forth.

"Tell me," I said, "how it was that your thumping brought such a quick response."

"I signalled in the code of knocking known to all jailers," he said.

I expressed my amazement and incredulity.

"Don't you fool yourself," he said. "There is a certain sort of mutual understanding between executioners and jailers on the one hand and criminals on the other. There must be a give and take in all trades, even between man-hunters and hunted men. They were on the watch for any signal I might give, if it really meant anything. They were pleased to hear. You'll see the results promptly."

In fact, after no long interval, the trap-door was lifted again and a rope lowered, up which Crispinillus was bidden to climb.

He embraced me time after time, saying that we should never set eyes on each other again and that, confession or no confession, he knew his doom was not far off; but he wanted me, as long as I lived, to remember the gratitude of Nona's husband, his thankfulness for my treatment of his family and his efforts to requite the service.

"Keep up a good heart, lad," he said. "You won't be long here alone in the dark, and you'll soon be as coddled and pampered as a man can be. Long life to you and good luck and may you be soon married and raise a fine family. Peace of mind and prosperity to you and yours and a green old age to you!"

And he climbed the rope, hand over hand, like the best sailor on Libo's yacht.

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CHAPTER XL SEVERUS

Not many hours later, I, sleeping soundly in the straw, was wakened by the raising of the trap-door. Again a rope was let down. This time two of the Executioner's helpers slid down the dangling rope. They addressed me most deferentially and asked permission to prepare me to be hauled up, thereupon adjusting the ropes about me.

In the upper chamber of the prison I was rubbed down and clothed in the best sort of tunic, shod with the ceremonial boots of a nobleman and wrapped in a nobleman's outer garments. Then I was led off to the nearest point to which a litter may approach the Mamertine Prison. The brilliant sunrays blinded me and the sight of Rome in the glory of a mellow July afternoon brought the tears to my eyes and made me gulp and swallow. But the tears did not blind me too much to recognize Imperial liveries on the litter-bearers and runners and intendant. I was obsequiously invited to enter the litter, the panels were slid, the curtains drawn, and the bearers set off. They carried me to the Palace!

There I was received by the new Chamberlain in person, to be sure with four armed guardsmen accompanying him, but himself as deferential as possible. By him I was conducted to a luxurious apartment, consisting of a large anteroom, a private library, a private triclinium, a private bathroom, and two bedrooms, all furnished with the most lavish abundance and in perfect taste.

I found a small regiment of servants to minister to my wants: a valet, a masseur, a cook, waiters, errand-pages, a reader and yet others. I could have anything I asked for in that apartment, but a guard at its outer door saw to it that I remained in it.

There I was bathed, massaged, obsequiously asked what dainties and wines I preferred, supplied with all I suggested and clothed in garments to my liking; huge heaps of togas, mantles, wraps, tunics and shoes being brought in for me to choose from. There I spent some comfortable days, sleeping much, having myself read to, mostly from the private letters of the Emperors, and from the Anticatones of the Divine Julius; and, from the balcony of the ante-room enjoying the splendid view southwestwards, over the Circus Maximus, the lower reaches of the Tiber and the Campagna, for my apartment was on that side of the Palace and high up.

When I asked if I might despatch letters to my friends I was told that the Emperor had given orders that I was to communicate with no one and no one with me. I worried over Vedia's anxiety and almost as much over the probable disquiet of Agathemer, Tanno and even of Galen. But I was helpless and endeavored to be calm. I was certainly comfortable and hopeful, though impatient.

At last, after six days of this luxurious imprisonment, on the day before the Ides of July, sometime before noon, my apartment was entered by Juvenalis himself in the full regalia of Prefect of the Palace. He greeted me deferentially and was most respectful. He informed me that the Emperor desired an interview with me and through him conveyed to me his regrets that it had had to be postponed so long and that I had been so long kept in confinement and seclusion. He had now come to conduct me to the Emperor, who was at last free to spend with me an hour or more. When my valet had made me comfortable and had prepared me for my private audience, Juvenalis escorted me to the upper private audience-hall, a chamber spacious and magnificent, though somewhat smaller than the lower private audience-hall and far smaller than the great hall for public audiences or the vast throne-room.

I followed Juvenalis along the corridors, elated by my nobleman's attire, but nervous at the prospect of coming face to face with the master of Rome and Italy, with the prospective (as he turned out to be in fact) master of the world.

I was ushered in and Juvenalis withdrew, shutting the door and leaving me alone with the great man. He rose from his chair, for it could not be called a throne, took a step or two towards me and greeted me affably, as one nobleman another. He bade me be seated, did not sit down himself until I had taken the chair he indicated; then he settled himself deliberately.

We eyed each other, in silence. I cannot conjecture what he thought of me, but I can never forget the impression made on me by him.

He wore the Imperial robes consciously. I had often noted how Commodus wore his without thought, as any fisherman wears his rags. Severus was aware of his regalia, and especially of the sky-blue shoes with the Imperial Eagles embroidered on them in gold thread. He looked a man in the best of health, completely fit for a frontier command, for open campaigning, full of surplus energy, hard-muscled, spare and enduring. Also he looked as competent, discerning, clear-headed and ruthless as a man could be. Most of all I diagnosed him as economical of himself, of his men and of his possessions, especially of cash; as swayed by self-interest alone, as flinty-hearted; yet as capable of kindness when it did not interfere with his plans and was not too expensive.

I waited in silence for him to speak. He said:

"I am a very busy man, even far too busy. Commodus left the treasury empty and every department of the government inefficient. Pertinax refilled the treasury, but his attempts at reorganization merely disorganized everything and prepared for the general confusion which came about under Julianus. With insufficient funds I must fill the Treasury, reorganize the whole governmental machinery, get it to working dependably and smoothly, and at the same time prepare for a civil war which I hope to win, but of which I can foretell the outcome no better than could the Divine Julius be sure of the outcome of his when he crossed the Rubicon. Amid all these cares and occupations I must keep fit and must do all I can to win the confidence and respect of all classes by rectifying, as far as I may, the consequences of the inattention of my predecessors and of the knavery and venality of their subordinates. And I must hurry off to deal with Pescennius Niger, who is no mean antagonist. Altogether I have no time for trifles.

"But I do not reckon your case as a trifle, though the safety of the Republic by no means hinges on it. And I am more interested in you than in any one individual outside of my family and connections. I have never heard of a man brought so near death, so ruined, but for the singular favor of the gods so utterly and so hopelessly ruined, subjected to such dangers and miseries, so baselessly, by such malevolent misrepresentations and fabrications. You deserve to be recompensed. You shall be. And besides the merits of your case I am curious about you.

"You must be curious yourself.

"When I foresaw that I was likely to be acclaimed Emperor by my soldiers and welcomed by the Senate as Prince of the Republic, I set on foot various measures certain to benefit the Commonwealth and the Empire. Especially I made an effort to abolish or at least curb the banditry, brigandage and outlawry which corrupts the entire rural population of Italy and is a national disgrace. I was successful in so far as that my emissaries broke up most of the bands of outlaws and captured many of them, particularly the most famous of all, known as the King of the Highwaymen.

"I had made sure to have secret agents watching all my emissaries, on whatever errand I had sent them. These secret agents reported that powerful influences were at work to bring about the escape of this arch-criminal. I set reliable men to find out what those influences were. Their investigations led straight to Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, a life-long member of the Imperial secret service, universally known as a professional informer, yet considered second to no man in the secret service as to usefulness and reliability, the only man among the spies of Commodus who had been trusted and retained by Pertinax and Julianus, the very man whom my relations in Rome, who had

kept me posted as to conditions here, had represented as most likely to be dependable and serviceable. I ordered him apprehended but he and his despicable sister, Galvia Crispinilla, escaped arrest by taking some of her poison. Their papers were seized, but so huge was the mass of them and so great their confusion that they could not be put in order and their secrets utilized at once. So sluggishly did their unravelling proceed that, although it was manifest at once that the precious pair had been agents in Rome for the King of the Highwaymen, had marketed for him his booty, had kept up an almost daily correspondence with him, had warned him of all facts and rumors likely to affect him, had maintained a highly organized and cleverly concealed system of secret agents and road-messengers for his benefit and theirs; yet, until his voluntary confession, neither I nor anyone else concerned had the slightest inkling that the King of the Highwaymen was named Caius Galvius Crispinillus and was a full brother to the procuress and poisoner and the professional spy, who had committed suicide to escape retribution for their villainies. Until his confession was brought to my attention I had equally no inkling that all relevant aspersions upon you had originated with or been transmitted by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus.

"The case against you, on the basis of the papers filed at Secret Service Headquarters, was most damnatory. You were represented to have been the man who had suggested to Egnatius Capito the formation of his conspiracy against Commodus; and to have planned for him the inclusion in it of all undetected survivors of the members of Lucilla's abortive conspiracy of the year before; to have offered yourself as the most likely man to succeed in assassinating Commodus, as he held you in high regard for some exploit in some roadside affray in Sabinum; to have pretended illness as a cloak for your machinations. Then it was represented, circumstantially, that, after the detection and foiling of Capito's conspiracy, you had taken ship for Spain, made your way to the camp of the rebel, Maternus, won his confidence, suggested to him the idea of a secret march on Rome, of the assassination of Commodus during the Festival of Cybele, planned for him the details of that secret march, managed it for him and come all the way from Spain to Rome with him.

"When his attempt failed, you, alone among his henchmen, escaped. You then, according to the reports, went straight to Britain, visited every important camp, infused into the garrisons the spirit of discontent, engineered their mutiny, suggested to them the sending of a dangerously large deputation to Rome, led that deputation and were its controlling spirit all the way to Rome, vanishing successfully when the mutineers were induced by Oleander to return to Britain and their associates, by his device, were massacred or consigned to ergastula.

"With such reports in my hands, with additions declaring that while neither your presence nor your influence could be proved, you were probably the guiding spirit in the

assassination of Pertinax, it is no wonder that I, crediting these apparently sincere and trustworthy statements, considered you the most dangerous among all the survivors of conspiracies against my predecessors, which conspirators, on principle, I meant to exterminate as an obvious measure of mere sensible precaution.

"No one seems to have recognized you as Andivius Hedulio while you were in the service of Pompeianus Falco under the name of Phorbas, except only Galen, who has explained and justified to me his reasons for protecting you, of which I entirely approve. He did well. As Phorbas I heard of you first, when it was represented to me that you had murdered your late master and been cleared by that indulgent humanitarian, Lollius Corbulo; that the case was a most flagrant miscarriage of justice and that such slackness would breed a crop of such murders unless temptation was counteracted by severity. I then directed Cassius Ravillanus to deal with you, for I trusted him.

"When, in the arena of the Colosseum, I saw the savage, ravening beasts not only spare you but fawn on you, I felt sure that you had been falsely convicted, that you were innocent and that the gods had intervened to save you. Later, when I heard the cries of 'Festus' and they were explained to me, I was doubly incensed against you. That no beast would touch you, even when bound and your face covered, convinced me of your complete innocence.

"Thereupon, after I had ordered you released, I had turned my attention again to the spectacle of the games in the arena, promising myself an interview with you later, for I was intensely curious about you. But, that very day, before dark, Flavius Clemens craved a brief private audience with me and informed me that he had recognized you as Andivius Hedulio and that you had confessed your identity. I ordered you at once into the Tullianum, pending my decision as to how to wring from you a complete disclosure of your villainies and accomplices before putting you to death.

"Then, to my amazement, the confession of the King of the Highwaymen represented you as a wholly innocent man, incredibly slandered and calumniated, and all by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, why and for what end was unknown.

"I at once ordered you released and brought to the Palace. Here I have kept you in unmerited confinement until the papers of your traducer could be sifted and I could go over those relevant to your case. Manifestly you never had anything to do with inciting any conspiracy or any march on Rome. All aspersions on you were invented by Crispinillus. I am inexpressibly curious about you. I want you to tell me your story in your own way, in detail, taking your time. In particular I want to learn how you came to be with Maternus and later with the mutineers from Britain. I am at leisure to harken."

He had put me entirely at my ease. Manifestly he wanted to hear my story, was in the mood to listen, and rather enjoyed the respite from care which this carefully arranged interval of leisure gave him. I felt emboldened and began with an explanation of the feud between the Satronians and the Vedians, of the lawsuit between Ducconius Furfur and my uncle, and of his purchase of Marcia from Ummidius Quadratus and his manumission of her.

After these preliminaries I launched into my story. He listened attentively and with every indication of lively interest, with few interruptions. Once he clapped for his pages and had in snow-cooled wine to refresh me and soothe my throat. Upon my account of my wrestle with Nemestronia's leopard he cut in with a series of questions as to my power over animals. When I came to my encounter with Pescennius Niger he was keenly interested, as in my report of his reputation in Marseilles, according to Doris, and uttered one or two remarks. Otherwise he was apparently absorbed in my narrative.

When it was over he said:

"I believe you, your story sounds true; all of it. You have had amazing adventures and have escaped alive manifestly by the special favor of the immortal gods, particularly of Mercury. Like you, I pay special attention to winning and keeping the favor of Mercury, though, of course, for me, as for all soldiers, Mithras is the most important god.

"You may be very sure that I shall, as far as may be, provide that no informer or secret-service agent can ever again succeed in gaining credence for baseless fabrications, such as those from which you have suffered. I shall endeavor to have it arranged that reports of any one agent be checked up by reports of another, the two being wholly unknown to each other. Thus no man shall, if I can prevent it, again be persecuted as you have been. I am shocked at such laxity and I shudder at the power wielded by Marcus Galvius Crispinillus, and at his misuse of it. I can find no trace of any reasonable motive; he seems to have slandered you from mere whim or the mere love of causing misery, or some spite or perhaps to increase the impression of his own importance.

"Now there looms before me the duty of seeing you restored to your rights, as to both rank and property.

"In respect to your standing as a Roman nobleman there has been, is and will be no difficulty. I have had everything attended to and all necessary formalities have been gone through, all official, public records made. You are a Roman nobleman in good standing with every right which your birth assured you.

"As to your property matters are not so simple. I find that you will be very wealthy, anyhow, as the heir of one-fourth of the estate of your late master, Pompeianus Falco, and also as inheritor of his marvellous collection of gems and curios, therefore, even without anything of your confiscated property, you will be affluent.

"But that does not absolve me from the duty of seeing justice done you; of putting you in possession of your house here in Rome and of your estates in Sabinum, and in Bruttium. I find that all these were held by the fiscus until after the death of Cleander. Owing to the destruction of a large part of the Palace records in the great fire I cannot make sure whether what I am told is true. I am told that your town house and country estates were granted by the fiscus, under proper seal, ostensibly by the command of Commodus, to the present owner. That present owner is in possession of the official transfer deeds and they are properly made out. Yet neither from the present owner nor from the deeds can it be ascertained which Prefect of the Palace authorized the transfer. Between Cleander and Aemilius Laetus, Commodus had thirty different Prefects of the Palace, most of them for very brief terms, one for less than a full day, for he was appointed after noon one day and put to death before noon of the day following. To a certainty, I cannot ever get legal proof that the grant was gotten by bribery or was in any way illegal.

"Therefore I cannot command the present holder to return your former property to the fiscus, in order that the fiscus may turn it over to you. Nor is there any precedent for one Prince revoking a grant made under a predecessor. Nor is there anything in our law or customs enabling me to bid the present holder to sell back to the fiscus your entire former property, even at a high valuation.

"Moreover I do not feel that I ought, unless I must, take from the treasury the cash necessary to repurchase your house and estates, so as to be able to restore you to full possession of them; or to hand you a sum in cash sufficient to recompense you for the confiscation of your heritage.

"Yet, whatever straits the treasury may be in, I pledge you my word that, if you cannot recover full possession of your estates in any other way, I shall compel the present holder to release them to the fiscus and shall order the fiscus to restore them to you, I, out of our depleted treasury, paying the present holder, but I do not want to resort to this unless all other means fail.

"Hoping that the matter may be adjusted in another way, easier for all three of us, I have arranged to have the present holder of your former estates here in the Palace.

"When this interview between you and me terminates, I shall have you escorted to a room where you will find awaiting you the present holder of your former estates. If you

two cannot come to some agreement by which, with full satisfaction to both of you, you become again possessed of your patrimony, I shall then take the measures to which I have pledged myself.

"To that end I have given orders that, if you formally make request for a second private audience with me, you shall have it, although I must leave Rome for the East within eight days and cannot despatch the imperative business awaiting me, even if I could go without food, rest or sleep. I mean what I say, you are to ask for a second audience if you really want one and if you ask for one you shall have it. But do not ask for it unless you must.

"And now, is there anything else you desire to say, or to request or any query you wish to put to me? If so, I authorize and command you to speak."

Choking, I muttered that I had nothing further to say.

"In that case," said the Emperor, standing up, "this interview is at an end. You shall be conducted to your conference with the present owner of your former estates, which I hope may turn out to your full satisfaction."

And he clapped his hands for a page.

The page conducted me through endless corridors, twisting and turning. During that brief interval I did a great deal of very confused thinking. I was dazed and puzzled. I had realized as he ended his harangue that it would have been ridiculous to ask that man to change his mind or even modify a decision. He was not that sort of Emperor. Yet he had pledged himself to restore to me my estates or recompense me in cash. I felt that he meant it; yet I knew that he would never have uttered that pledge if he had felt that there was the remotest chance of his ever being called on to fulfill it. He was too parsimonious to promise such generosity unless absolutely certain that the occasion for it would never confront him. Yet how could he escape it and why did he feel so sure? How could any beneficiary from such a grant of confiscated property be induced to disgorge except by Imperial order and that with full compensation? Why had Severus so sedulously, yet so obviously, avoided naming the present holder of my former property? The Emperor was an austere man, stern by habit, almost grim by nature, certainly serious. He had spoken seriously. Yet I sensed a jest somewhere in the background of his thoughts. I almost believed I had caught the glint of a twinkle in his hard, gray eyes. Could I be wrong? Could I be right?

It seemed like a jest to send me to an interview with a beneficiary of a grant of confiscated property, enriched thereby, and to imply, even to suggest, that he might be

induced to restore to me his acquisitions, without pressure, merely by amicable converse. I conjured up before me the probable appearance of the man I was to meet; perhaps gross and greedy like Satronius Satro, perhaps dwarfish and mean like Vedius Vedianus, probably like anyone of the avaricious magnates, associated with Pullanius, whom I had met while impersonating Salsonius Salinator.

I resented the possibility of an Imperial jest. I was more and more dazed and puzzled the nearer I approached the inevitable interview and the nearer I approached it the more futile and hopeless it seemed and the more despondent I grew.

The page paused at a door, opened it, waved me in and shut it.

I was in a small parlor, and there was no other man in it; I saw only one seated human figure, a woman, a lady, a graceful young woman, a charming young woman.

Then, suddenly, I saw through it all.

My troubles were indeed at an end.

I recognized Vedia!

EPILOGUE

I do not think it necessary to describe in detail my marriage to Vedia, nor our dinners at Nemestronia's, at Tanno's, at Segontius Almo's; nor the dinners we gave at my old home, after it had been fitted up to our liking, all trace of its occupancy by tenants effaced and we had settled there.

Why tell at length of my manumission of Agathemer, of my endowment of him with a goodly share of my heritage from poor Falco, or of his disposition of Falco's gems and his rapid acquisition of vast wealth and of his continued prosperity?

When my misfortunes began Nemestronia was past her eighty-fourth birthday. After my rehabilitation Vedia and I helped at the celebration of her ninety-fifth, and of three more.

Nemestronia lived almost to her hundredth birthday, in full possession of her faculties and, until near the end, in marvellously good health. She is still remembered as having been the oldest noble matron ever known in Rome.

Like her, Chryseros Philargyrus, though long past the usual term of human life when my disasters overtook us, survived my nine winters of adventures and lived to greet me as a son rearsen from the dead, in the tenth summer after he had sped me on my way in the midnight woods from Ducconius Furfur's land.

Enough to say that Vedia and I, from a second-floor balcony, watched pass the triumphal procession of our great Prince of the Republic, Septimius Severus, when he returned victorious over both his rivals and reentered Rome, indubitably master of the world.

As to my later life I cannot forbear remarking that I am the only man with pierced ears who ever mingled as an equal with the bathers in the Baths of Titus, the only man, certainly, with a brand mark on his shoulder and scourge-scars on his back who ever habitually frequented that most magnificent of our fashionable pleasure-resorts. My brand-marks and scourge-scars have not diminished my enjoyment of life except that they frequently give bores a pretext for insisting on my narrating my adventures.

Of course, as in my city mansion, so also at Villa Andivia, I have had constructed and consecrated a handsome private chapel to Mercury.

NOTES TO ANDIVIUS HEDULIO

A. THE ROMAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

From the expulsion of the Kings, the people of Rome, assembled in their voting-field outside their city, each year elected the magistrates for the year: others, and especially quaestors, answering to our army-paymaster and custom-house collectors; praetors (judges, generals and governors of provinces), and two consuls, acting as chief-magistrates and generals-in-chief. A man was generally first quaestor, later praetor and finally consul, often holding other intermediary offices.

Ex-officials, who had held the more important offices of the Republic, became by immemorial custom life-members of the Senate, which was never an elective, always a selective body, without legal authority but with great influence. As the Republic's Empire spread the Senate was less and less able to control provincial governors, until such self-confident geniuses as Sulla, Caesar and Augustus became able to control it. The Roman Republic was never abolished, and did not die till the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453. It conquered a great Empire and when its Senate could no longer control the magistrates who managed that Empire, its soldiers who, by conquering and holding provinces to pay taxes maintained the Empire and the Republic, wearied of the incompetence of the Senate's appointees, of the squabbles and strife of their leaders, chose by acclamation one commander whom they loved and trusted. The

Senate, at his mercy, legalized his sovereignty by conferring on him for life the powers of a Tribune, an official who could initiate nothing, but had the legal power to forbid anything and everything.

The Senate continued to administer those provinces reckoned safe from invasion or insurrection; always two governed by ex-consuls and about ten governed each by an ex-praetor. It continued to dispose of the funds derived from their taxes and to recruit itself from ex-magistrates and to retain much of its influence, dignity and importance.

The outer provinces and those prone to turbulence were governed not by ex-consuls and ex-praetors acting in the name of the Senate, but each by a deputy of the Emperor, styled *propraetor*, *praeses*, or *procurator*. These were called imperial provinces. The magistrates of the senatorial provinces were, under the Empire, no longer elected by the people, but appointed by the Senate, with or without an indication of the Emperor's wishes.

The Romans never devised any method of choosing a chief magistrate other than acclamation by an army and confirmation by the Senate, creating an Emperor. If two commanders at about the same time were separately saluted "Imperator," as were Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger, there was no method of adjudicating their conflicting claims except by Civil War and the survival of one Emperor only.

B. THE FISCUS

From this word comes our "confiscate," "to turn totally into the Fiscus." A fiscus was a large basket, such is were used by all Roman financial concerns to contain live vouchers. The fiscus was the organization managing the public property, income and expenditures of the Roman Emperor. It controlled the proceeds of the taxes of all the imperial provinces and of the domains, mines, quarries, fisheries, factories, town property and whatever else the fiscus held for the Emperors, impersonally. It gathered in all moneys and possessions forfeited for suicide, crime or treason.

C. THE ROMAN CALENDAR

All primitive calendars went by the moon. Moon and month are the same word in English. No more than Hengist and Horsa could the early Romans have conceived of a month not beginning with the day of the new moon, as all months begin yet in the Jewish and Mohammedan calendars.

The first day of each month the Romans called its *Kalends* (announcement day). After that day they called each day so many before the Nones (half moon), then so many

before the Ides (full moon), then so many to the Kalends of the next month. Julius Caesar, impatient with the difficulties of fitting together the solar and lunar calendars, bade his experts ignore the moon and divide the solar year into twelve months. They did, and his calendar, with trifling improvements, has lasted till our days. The Romans continued to reckon days before the Nones, Ides and Kalends. The Nones fell on the seventh of March, May, July and October, on the fifth of the other months; the Ides on the fifteenth of March, May, July and October and on the thirteenth of the rest.

D. THE LEGION

The legion, always the largest fighting unit of the Roman armies, corresponded most nearly to our regiment, but had also features of our brigade. It was always rostered as of 6,000 men, all told. But the causes which operate in all armies brought it about that a legion in the field had usually about 5,000 men. It was divided into sixty bodies resembling our companies, called centuries, because nominally of 100 men, each commanded by a centurion. The Roman army never, like ours, had tiering grades of officers; it always, theoretically, consisted of soldiers, centurions and the commander: other officers were additional and special. Each centurion chose from among his men an *optio*, to assist him and to take his place if killed. These *optiones* corresponded most nearly to our corporals, but their duties and authority were always very vague. The centurions corresponded to our sergeants, in that they were picked men from the ranks, but they had all the duties and powers of our lieutenants and, some of them, of much higher officers. Three centuries made up a *maniple*, more or less like one of our battalions, each commanded by its senior centurion. Two *maniples* made up a *cohort*, also commanded by its senior centurion, and the ten centurions commanding cohorts were the actual officers of the legion, its head centurion an officer of great importance.

True, a *tribunus militum* (tribune of the soldiers) was attached to each cohort; but he did more advising than commanding, though, in theory, he represented the general. The tribunes answered to our captains. Under the Empire each legion was commanded by a *legatus*, who also represented the general in his absence. Such an officer corresponded most nearly to our colonel, but had many of the characteristics of a brigadier-general.

E. "Ubi tu Caius, ego Caia."

These words, never varied whatever the names of the bride and groom, were the kernel of the Roman wedding ritual and after their utterance the bride was a wife. They correspond to the "I do" and "love, honor and obey" of our customary marriage formulas. As Caius and Caia were far and away the most frequent names among the Romans the phrase might be rendered: "Where you are Jack, I'm Jill."

No English words convey precisely the mingling of banter, and earnestness, of archness, devotion, shyness and fervor implied in the Latin words as uttered by Vedia.

F. OPTIONES

Private soldiers chosen by their centurions as informal assistant- centurions; to take their superior's place if he fell in battle, or was disabled or ill, and to assist him with his routine duties. They correspond more or less to the corporals of modern armies. (See also NOTE D.)

G. SPINA

The stone wall, platform, or long narrow structure down the middle of the arena of a Roman circus, dividing its race-course into half laps. Along it the teams tore at top speed, for the short turns about its rounded ends their drivers reined them in. The spina was about 660 feet long. It varied from a low wall to a gorgeous and complicated series of structures.

H. ERGASTULUM

A hard-labor prison, whether belonging to a private person, company or municipality, usually below ground-level, for criminal, dangerous, unmanageable or runaway slaves.

J. COMMODUS AS AN ATHLETE

Even more than Babe Ruth at baseball Commodus was a wonder at beast- killing in the amphitheater. Dio Cassius, who, being a senator, looked on from a front seat, says (LXXII, 18.) that he killed a hundred bears in one day. Herodian, who grew up with men who had known Commodus and had been spectators of his prowess, says (I; 15; 3, 4, 5, 6.) that when he speared lions and leopards no one saw a second javelin cast nor any wound not fatal, that he sent his dart at will through the forehead or the heart of an animal rushing at top speed and that his missile never struck any part of a beast except so as both to wound and kill. Hurling his javelins from a distance he killed a hundred lions let out of the crypts of the Colosseum with precisely the same number of spear-casts, no dart missing its mark.

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