



***EDWARD LUCAS  
WHITE***

***ANDIVIUS  
HEDULIO:  
ADVENTURES  
OF A ROMAN  
NOBLEMAN  
IN THE DAYS  
OF THE EMPIRE***

**Edward Lucas White**

# **Andivius Hedulio: Adventures of a Roman Nobleman in the Days of the Empire**

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# **BOOK I**

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## **DISASTER**

# CHAPTER I

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### AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

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

It was not that misfortune then suddenly overwhelmed me, not that, sharp as a blown trumpet, I heard the voice of doom blare over me; not that, as one sees the upper rim of the sun vanish beneath the waves where the skyline meets the sea, and knows day ended and night begun, not thus that I recognized the end of my prosperity and the beginning of my disasters. That moment came later, as I shall record. It was rather that; as, in certain states of the weather, long before sunset one may be suddenly aware

that afternoon is past and evening approaches; so, though I had no intimation at the moment, yet, reviewing my memories I realize that at that instant began the chain of trivial circumstances which led up to my calamity and enmeshed me in ruin.

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

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

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

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

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

"Who is your master?" I asked.

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

I turned to Agathemer.

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

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

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

I raised my finger and counted.

"One! Two! Three!"

Both together we uttered:

"Opsitius Tanno!"

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

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

"No one else," he agreed, "but I should be no more surprised to see the Emperor himself in this part of the world."

"One of his wild whims," I conjectured. "Nothing else would tear him away from the city."

I meditated.

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

Agathemer nodded. The pleasantest of his many good qualities was that whatever he might be asked to do he carried out without comment or objection. Nothing was too

big or too small for him. If he were asked to arrange for an interview with the Emperor or to attend to the creasing of a toga he was equally painstaking and obliging. He went off, followed by the negro. I waited on the terrace for Tanno. There was no use attempting to bathe until after his arrival. Presently a cheerful halloo from the litter reached my ears. It was Tanno to a certainty. Nobody else of my acquaintance had voice enough to make himself heard at that distance or was sufficiently lacking in dignity to emit a yawp in that fashion. When his escort came near enough I could see that all his bearers wore the same livery as his runner. Tanno was forever changing his liveries and each fresh invention he managed to make more fantastic than the last. There were eight bearers to the litter and some twenty reliefs. Travelling long distances by litter, begun as a necessity to such invalids as my uncle, had become a fashion through the extreme coxcombery of wealthy fops and the practice of the young Emperor. Tanno's litter had all its panels slid back, and the curtains were not drawn. He was sitting almost erect, propped up by countless down cushions. He greeted me with many waves of the hand and a smile as genial as his halloo. I went down a little from the terrace to meet him and walked a few paces beside the litter. He rolled out and embraced me cordially, appearing as glad to see me as I was delighted to see him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You needn't tell me," he said, "that your runners haven't taken letters to Vedia, but she is supposed not to hear from you, so, as I told of two of your letters to me, I have, in a way been held responsible for you and have been pelted with inquiries. Nemestronia loves you like a grandson, and, if you ask me, I say Vedia is in love with you out and out. As I had heard from you and nobody else had, I began to feel as if I ought to look after you. Everything was abominably humdrum and I deceived myself into thinking I should enjoy the smell of green fields. I certainly should have turned back less than half way if I had been concerned with anybody else than you; and when we turned off the Via Salaria into your country byroad I cursed you and your neighbors and all Sabinum. The most deserted stretch of road I ever travelled in all my life. I saw only six human beings before I reached your villa and I had heard that this valley was populous and busy. I slept last night at Vicus Novus and I started this morning, bright and early. When we turned up the road below Villa Satronia I was never more disgusted in my life. My men are perfectly matched in height, weight, pace and action and any eight of the lot will carry me at full speed as smoothly as a pleasure-barge. But they could make nothing of that road. It is all washed, guttered, dusty in the open places, puddly where trees hang over it and full of loose stones on top everywhere.

"I was so horribly jolted that I called the bearers to stop. I made

Dromanus get off his horse and give me his poncho and his big felt hat.

Then I got on his horse and told him to get into the litter. He

was  
embarrassed.

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

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

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

"I knew the entrance to the Satronian estate by the six big chestnut- trees, you had often described them to me;

and I knew the next private road by the single huge plane tree. But when we crossed the second bridge, the little one, I went over that round hill and did not recognize the foot of your road when we came to it. I was for going on. Dromanus called from behind the curtains of the litter:

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

"I was stubborn and sang back at him:

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

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

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

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

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

"He had enough sense to tell us the name of the village," Tanno retorted, "and I had to acknowledge to Dromanus he was right, and so we turned round. When we were hardly

more than out of sight of Vediumnum we met another party, a respectable-looking man, much like a farm bailiff, on horseback, and two slaves afoot. I had not seen them before, and they, apparently, had not previously seen us. The rider asked, very decently, whose was the party. I treated them as I had the others.

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

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

"Just after we turned into your road, I stopped the escort and told Dromanus to take his horse. He had relieved me of his hat and poncho and I had one hand on the litter, ready to climb in, when I heard hoofs behind us on the road. I looked back. There was a rider on a beautiful bay mare coming up at a smartish lope. Just as he came abreast of us she shied at the litter and reared and began to prance about. I give you my word I never had such a fright in my life. If you can imagine Commodus in an old weather-beaten, broad-brimmed hat of soft, undyed felt and a mean, cheap, shaggy poncho of undyed wool, and worse than the hat, that was the man on the mare. He was left-handed, too."

"How did you know that?" I asked.

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

"The mare was a magnificent beast, vicious as a fury, with a mouth as hard as an eighty-pound tunny. He sat her

like Castor himself. She pirouetted back and forth across the road and my fellows scampered from under her hoofs. The mare was such a beauty I could not take my eyes off her."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where did you get your new bearers? They look to me like Nemestronia's.

What have you done with your Saxons?"

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

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

"As fretful as possible," he said. "The trouble with Commodus is that he is growing tired of exhibiting himself as an athlete to invited audiences in the Palace. He is perfectly frantic to show himself off in the Circus or in the Amphitheatre. He oscillates between the determination to disregard convention and to do as he likes and virtuous resolutions, when he has been given a good talking-to by his old councillors and has made up his mind to behave properly. He will break out yet into public exhibitions of

himself. He is really pathetically unhappy over his hard lot and positively wails about the amount of his time which is taken up with State business and about the pitifully small opportunity he has for training and exercise."

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

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

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

"That is on the Aemilian property," I answered. "Villa Aemilia has a direct outlet to the Via Valeria and the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the other. You will meet the proprietors at dinner, as I told you. They should be here now."

"Goggling country bumpkins?" he conjectured.

"Not a bit like that," I countered, "though you would scarcely call them cultured. There is no art connoisseur among them. They care little for books, but they are educated gentlemen and can talk of other subjects besides vine-growing and cattle breeding. They have all been to Rome, the Ducconians are the only stay-at-home, stick-in-the-mud family in this valley. You will find all your fellow-diners keenly interested in anything you can tell them about the latest fashions and the latest gossip from Rome. They think and talk of the doings of Rome's fast set much more than you do."

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

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

"Do you ever see Ducconius?" he asked.

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

up to where the road forks and is crossed by the Bran Brook. You can see the bridge from here."

Tanno shaded his eyes with his hand.

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

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

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

"The only unpleasant feature for me is that the tenant of the farm so long in dispute cannot be ousted. He was heart and soul with Ducconius all through the period of the suit. His daughter is married to one of Ducconius' tenants and his younger son has taken one of Ducconius' farms since three of his tenant-families died off year before, last with the plague. This makes old Chryseros Philargyrus by no means a pleasant tenant for me."

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

"Really his name," I affirmed. "His mother was so extravagant and wasteful that his father named him Chryseros Philargyrus as a sort of antidote incantation, in

the hope that it might prove a good omen of his disposition and predispose him to parsimony. He certainly has turned out sufficiently close-fisted to justify the choice."

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

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

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

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

"Oh, yes," Tanno drawled, "it works just as well as one slave-gang under one bailiff. That is why you have not had to inspect your estates in Bruttium, why you have not

visited Bruttium at all, why you have not so much as thought of visiting Bruttium, whereas you have had to spend more than two months here in these fascinating wilds. You can trust your tenantry so completely that you only have to spend two months making sure they are not idling or cheating you: you can trust your Bruttian bailiff so poorly that you let him alone absolutely."

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

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

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

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

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

"You do not understand," I declared.

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

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

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

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

"I do not know," Tanno ruminated, "which to admire more, the beauties of the Sabine tenant system or the wonders of the Sabine character. Any other man I know would have stayed in Rome and attended strictly to his courtship and let his estates take care of themselves. You are supposed to be violently in love and you certainly behave like it: yet you leave Rome and Vedia and shut yourself up among these damp cold hills and inspect and reinspect and make a final inspection, and delay for one last peep and linger for one final glance, where any other man would ignore the property and be with the widow."

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

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

"More than ten times," I admitted.

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

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

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

## CHAPTER II

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## A COUNTRY DINNER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As soon as the stable-boys had led off their horses we started bathwards, delayed a moment by the arrival of a slave of Entedius, on a mule, leading another heavily laden with two packs. We made a quick bath, with no loitering, and at once went in to dinner. My uncle had been to the last degree conservative and old-fashioned. He would have nothing to do with any new inventions, save his own. So he would not hear of any alterations in the furnishings of his villa, except those suggested by his ideas of sanitation. Otherwise it had been kept just as my grandfather had left it to him. In particular uncle could not be brought to like the newly popular C-shaped dining sofas, which all Rome and all fashionables all over Italy and the provinces had so acclaimed and so promptly adopted along with circular-topped dining-tables. My *triclinium* still held grandfather's square-topped table and the three square sofas about it. Uncle's will, in fact, had stipulated that no furnishings of the villa must be altered within five years of the date of his death. As I had to adjust my formal dinners to the old style, I was not only delighted to have Tanno with us for himself and

for his jollity, but also because he just made up the nine diners demanded by ancient convention.

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

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

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

The two second assistant waiter boys took our shoes and we disposed ourselves on the sofas, Tanno in the place of

honor, I rejoicing again that his presence had solved, acceptably to all the rest, the otherwise insoluble problem of to whom I should accord that location.

Agathemer handed me the note. At sight of it I recognized the handwriting of Vedius Caspo. Of course, like my uncle before me, I always invited to any of my formal entertainments all my neighbors except Ducconius Furfur, our enemy, and the only neighbor with whom we were not on good terms. Equally, of course, Vedius Caspo at Villa Vedia and Satronius Dromo at Villa Satronia, regularly found some transparent pretext for declining my invitation, each fearing that, if he accepted, the other might by some prank of the gods of chance accept also, and they might encounter each other.

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

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

"Farewell."

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

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

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

I yielded.

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

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

Before anybody else could speak he went on:

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

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