EXCITER

Galaxy NOVEL NO. 24

35¢

Lest Darkness Fall

L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

LEST DARKNESS FALL

by

L. Sprague de Camp

●

A Hilarious, Fast

Moving Novel of a Situation

That Could Not Happen to You

●

GALAXY PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
New York 14, N. Y.

NOVEL No. 24

Other novels available at the publisher.

See page 127.

●

The characters, the location, and the incidents in this book are entirely the product of the author's imagination and have no relation to any person or event in real life.

Printed by
THE GUINN COMPANY
421 Hudson Street
New York 14, N. Y.

CHAPTER I

Tancredi took his hands off the wheel again and waved them. "—so I envy you, Dr. Padway. Here in Rome we have still some work to do. But *pah!* It is all filling in little gaps. Nothing big, nothing new. And restoration work. Building contractor's work. Again, *pah!*"

"Professor Tancredi," said Martin Padway patiently, "as I said, I am not a doctor. I hope to be one soon, if I can get a thesis out of this Lebanon dig." Being himself the most cautious of drivers, his knuckles were white from gripping the side of the little Fiat, and his right foot ached from trying to shove it through the floor boards.

Tancredi snatched the wheel in time to avoid a lordly Isotta. "Oh, what is the difference? Here everybody is a doc-tor, whether he is or not, if you understand me. And such a smart young man as you— What was I talking about?"

"That depends." Padway closed his eyes as a pedestrian just escaped destruction. "You were talking about Etruscan inscriptions, and then about the nature of time, and then about—"

"Ah, yes, the nature of time. I was saying all these people who just disappear, they have slipped back down the trunk of the tree of time. When they stop slipping, they are back in some former time. But as soon as they do anything, they change all subsequent history."

"Sounds like a paradox," said Padway.

"No-o. The trunk continues to exist. But a new branch starts out where they come to rest. It has to, otherwise we would all disappear, because history would have changed and our parents might not have met."

"That's a thought," said Padway. "It's bad enough knowing the sun might become a nova, but if we're also likely to vanish because somebody has gone back to the twelfth century—"

"No. That has never happened. We have never vanished, that is. You see, doc-tor? We continue to exist, but another history has been started. Perhaps there are many such, all existing somewhere. Maybe the man comes to rest in the middle of the ocean. So what? The fish eat him, and things go on as before. Or they think he is mad, and shut him up or kill him. Again, not much difference. But suppose he becomes a king or a *duce?* What then?

"*Presto,* we have a new history! History is a four-dimensional

web. It is a tough web. But it has weak points. The junction places—the focal points, one might say—are weak. The back-slipping, if it happens, would happen at these places."

"What do you mean by focal points?" asked Padway.

"Oh, places like Rome, where the world-lines of many famous events intersect. Or Istanbul. Or Babylon. You remember that archaeologist. Skrzetuski. who disappeared at Babylon in 1936?"

"I thought he was killed by some Arab holdup men."

"Ah. They never found his body! Now. Rome may soon again be the intersection point of great events. The web. as I say, is tough. If a man did slip back. it would take a terrible lot of work to distort it. Like a fly in a spider web that fills a room."

"Pleasant thought." said Padway.

"Is it not, though?" Tancredi turned to grin at him, then trod frantically on the brake. He turned back to Padway. "Are you coming to my house for dinner tomorrow?"

"Wh-what? Why, yes. I'll be glad to. I'm sailing next—"

"*Si si.* I will show you the equations I have worked out. Energy must be conserved. even in changing one's time. But nothing of this to my colleagues. please. Things get out. and people talk. Archaeologists talk even worse than most people. Are you married?"

"What?" Padway felt he should have gotten used to this sort of thing by now. He hadn't. "Why—yes."

"Good. Bring your wife along."

"She's back in Chicago." Padway didn't feel like explaining that he and his wife had been separated for over a year.

He could see, now, that it hadn't been entirely Betty's fault. To a person of her background and tastes he must have seemed pretty impossible: a man who danced badly, refused to play bridge, and whose idea of fun was to get a few similar creatures in for an evening of heavy talk. At first she had been thrilled by the idea of traveling in far places, but one taste of living in a tent and watching her husband mutter over the inscriptions on potsherds had cured that.

And he wasn't much to look at—rather small. with outsize nose and ears in a diffident manner. At college they had called him Mouse Padway. Oh, well, a man in exploratory work was a fool to marry, anyway.

"Could you drop me at the Pantheon?" he asked. "I've never ex-

amined it closely, and it's just a couple of blocks to my hotel."

"Yes, doc-tor, though I am afraid you will get wet. It looks like rain, does it not?"

"That's all right. This coat will shed water."

Tancredi shrugged. They bucketed down the Corso Vittorio Emanuele and screeched around the corner into the Via Cestari. Padway got out at the Piazza del Pantheon, and Tancredi departed waving both arms and shouting: "Tomorrow at eight, then? *Si,* fine."

Padway looked at the building for a few minutes. He had always thought it a very ugly one, with the Corinthian front stuck on the brick rotunda. Of course that great concrete dome had taken some engineering, considering when it had been erected. His reflections were cut off in their prime by the granddaddy of all lightning flashes, which struck the Piazza to his right. The pavement dropped out from under him like a trapdoor.

It was a most disconcerting feeling, hanging in the midst of nothing. He felt somewhat as Alice must have felt on her leisurely fall down the rabbit-hole, except that his senses gave him no clear information as to what was happening. He could not even guess how fast it was happening.

Then something hard smacked his soles. The impact was about as strong as that resulting from a two-foot fall.

He was standing in the depression caused by the drop of a roughly circular piece of pavement. The rain was coming down hard, now. He climbed out of the pit and ran under the portico of the Pantheon.

Padway saw something curious: the red brick of the rotunda was covered by slabs of marble facing. That must be one of the restoration jobs that Tancredi had been complaining about.

Padway's eyes glided indifferently over the nearest of the loafers. They switched back again sharply. The man, instead of coats and pants, was wearing a dirty white woolen tunic. Padway's eyes began to dance from person to person. They were all wearing tunics. Some had come under the portico to get out of the rain. These also wore tunics, sometimes with poncho-like cloaks over them.

A few of them stared at Padway without much curiosity. He and they were still staring when the shower let up a few minutes later. Padway knew fear.

The tunics alone would not have frightened him. A single incongruous fact might have a rational if recondite explanation. But everywhere he looked, more of these facts crowded in on him.

The concrete sidewalk had been replaced by slabs of slate. There were still buildings around the Piazza, but they were not the same buildings. Over the lower ones, Padway could see that the Senate House and the Ministry of Communications—both fairly conspicuous objects—were missing. The sounds were different. The honk of taxi horns was absent. Instead, two oxcarts creaked slowly and shrilly down the Via della Minerva.

Padway sniffed. The garlic-and-gasoline aroma of modern Rome had been replaced by a barnyard-and-backhouse symphony. Another ingredient was incense, wafting from the door of the Pantheon.

The sun came out. Yes, the portico still bore the inscription crediting the construction of the building to M. Agrippa.

Glancing around to see that he was not watched, Padway stepped up to one of the pillars and slammed his fist into it. It hurt.

He thought, I'm not asleep. All this is too solid and consistent for a dream.

But if he was not asleep, what?

There was Tancredi's theory about slipping back in time. Had he slipped back, or had something happened to him to make him imagine he had? The time-travel idea did not appeal to Padway. It sounded metaphysical, and he was a hardened empiricist.

There was the possibility of amnesia. Suppose that flash of lightning had actually hit him and suppressed his memory up to that time; then suppose something had happened to jar it loose again . . . He would have a gap in his memory between the first lightning flash and his arrival in this archaistic copy of old Rome. All sorts of things might have happened in the meantime. He might have blundered into a movie set.

He listened to the chatter of a couple of the loafers. He could not quite get the substance of these men's talk.

He thought of Latin. At once the loafer's speech became more familiar. They were not speaking Classical Latin. But Padway found that if he took one of their sentences and matched it first against Italian and then against Latin, he could understand most of it.

He decided that they were speaking a late form of Vulgar Latin,

rather more than halfway from the language of Cicero to that of Dante.

The two loafers had observed his eavesdropping. They frowned, lowered their voices, and moved off.

No, the hypothesis of delirium might be a tough one, but it offered fewer difficulties than that of the time-slip.

If he was imaging things, was he really standing in front of the Pantheon and imaging that the people were dressed and speaking in the manner of the period 300-900 A.D.? Or was he lying in a hospital bed recovering from near-electrocution and imaging he was in front of the Pantheon? In the former case he ought to find a policeman and have himself taken to a hospital. In the latter this would be waste motion. For safety's sake he had better assume the former.

A beggar had been whining at him for a couple of minutes. Padway gave such a perfect impression of deafness that the ragged little hunchback moved off. Now another man was speaking to him. On his left palm the man held a string of beads with a cross, all in a heap.

Padway asked in Italian: "Could you tell me where I could find a policeman?"

The man thought, and said he didn't know.

Padway started to turn elsewhere. But the seller of beads called to another hawker: "*Marco!* The gentleman wants to find a police agent."

"The gentleman is brave. He is also crazy," replied Marco.

The bead-seller laughed. Padway grinned a little; the people were human if not very helpful. He said: "Please, I—really—want—to—know."

"Marco, where can the gentleman find an agent of the municipal prefect?"

"I don't know," said Marco.

If this were twentieth-century Rome, there would be no difficulty about finding a cop. So he must be in (a) a movie set, (b) ancient Rome (the Tancredi hypothesis), or (c) a figment of his imagination.

He started walking.

It was not long before any lingering hopes about a movie set were dashed by the discovery that this alleged ancient city stretched for miles in all directions, and that its street plan was quite different

from that of modern Rome. Padway found his little pocket map nearly useless.

The signs on the shops were in intelligible Classical Latin. The spelling had remained as in Cæsar's time, if the pronunciation had not.

The streets were narrow, and for the most part not very crowded. The town had a drowsy, shabby-genteel, run-down personality.

At one relatively busy intersection Padway watched a man on a horse direct traffic. He would hold up a hand to stop an oxcart, and beckon a sedan chair across. The man wore a gaudily striped shirt and leather trousers. He looked like a central or northern European rather than an Italian.

Only two hypotheses remained: delirium and time-slip. Delirium now seemed less probable. He would act on the assumption that things were in fact what they seemed.

He couldn't stand there indefinitely. He'd have to ask questions and get himself oriented. The idea gave him gooseflesh. Come on, Padway get a grip on yourself. "I beg your pardon, but could you tell me the date?"

The man addressed, a mild-looking person with a loaf of bread under his arm, stopped and looked blank. "*Quī' é?* What is it?"

Padway fumbled for his date-book and pencil. He wrote his request on a page of the date-book, and held the thing up.

The man rattled a long sentence at him. It might as well have been in Trabresh. Padway waved his hands despairingly, crying, "*Lento!*"

The man backed up and started over. "I said I understood you, and I thought it was October 9th, but I wasn't sure because I couldn't remember whether my mother's wedding anniversary came three days ago or four."

"What year?"

"Twelve eighty-eight *Anno Urbis Conditae.*"

It was Padway's turn to be puzzled. "Please, what is that in the Christian era?"

"You mean how many years since the birth of Christ?"

"*Hoc ille*—that's right."

"Well, now—I don't know; five hundred and something. Better ask a priest, stranger."

"I will," said Padway. "Thank you."

"It's nothing," said the man, and went about his business. Padway's knees were weak, though the man had answered his question in a civil enough manner.

What was he to do? He'd have to find a place to sleep and a method of making a living. He was a little startled when he realized how quickly he had accepted the Tancredi theory as a working hypothesis.

He strolled up an alley to be out of sight and began going through his pockets. The roll of Italian bank notes would be about as useful as a broken five-cent mousetrap. A book of American Express traveler's checks, a Roman street-car transfer, an Illinois driver's license, a leather case full of keys—all ditto. His pen, pencil, and lighter would be useful as long as ink, leads, and lighter fuel held out. His pocketknife and his watch would undoubtedly fetch good prices, but he wanted to hang onto them as long as he could. And his coins?

He stopped before an establishment that advertised itself as that of S. Dentatus, goldsmith and money changer. He took a deep breath and went in.

S. Dentatus had a face rather like that of a frog. Padway laid out his change and said: "I . . . I should like to change this into local money, please."

S. Dentatus blinked at the coins. He picked them up, one by one, and scratched at them a little with a pointed instrument. "Where do these—you—come from?"

"America."

"Never heard of it."

"It is a long way off."

"Hm-m-m. What are these made of? Tin?"

"Nickel."

"What's that? Some funny metal they have in your country?"

"*Hoc ille.*"

"What's it worth?"

Padway thought for a second of trying to put a fantastically high value on the coins. While he was working up his courage, S. Dentatus interrupted his thoughts:

"It doesn't matter, because I wouldn't touch the stuff. There wouldn't be any market for it. But these other pieces—let's see—" He got out a balance and weighed the bronze coins, and then the silver coins. He pushed counters up and down the grooves of a

little bronze abacus, and said: "They're worth just under one solidus. Give you a solidus even for them."

A man stepped up to the counter beside him. He was a heavy, ruddy man with a flaring brown mustache and his hair in a long bob. He wore a linen blouse and long leather pants. He grinned at Padway, and reeled off: "*Ho, frijond, habais faurthei! Alai skalljans sind waidedjans.*"

Oh, Lord, another language! Padway answered: "I . . . I am sorry, but I do not understand."

The man's face fell a little; he dropped into Latin: "Sorry, thought you were from the Chersonese, from your clothes. I couldn't stand around and watch a fellow Goth swindled without saying anything."

S. Dentatus sighed resignedly. "Oh, very well, a solidus and a half. How am I to live, with you fellows interferring with legitimate business all the time? That would be, at the current rate of exchange, one solidus thirty-one sesterces."

"What is this about a rate of exchange?" asked Padway.

The Goth answered: "The gold-silver rate. Gold has been going down the last few months."

Padway said: "I think I will take it all in silver."

While Dentatus sourly counted out ninety-three sesterces, the Goth asked: "Where do you come from? Somewhere up in the Hunnish country?"

"No," said Padway, "a place farther than that, called America."

"Well, now, that's interesting. I'm glad I met you, young fellow. It'll give me something to tell the wife about." He fumbled in his handbag and brought out a large gold ring and an unfaceted gem. "Sextus, this thing came out of its setting again. Fix it up, will you? And no substitutions, mind."

As they went out, the Goth spoke to Padway in a lowered voice. "The real reason I'm glad to come to town is that somebody put a curse on my house."

"A curse? What kind of a curse?"

The Goth nodded solemnly. "A shortness-of-breath curse. When I'm home, I can't breathe. I go around like this—" He gasped asthmatically. "But as soon as I get away from home, I'm all right."

"Tell me," said Padway, "do you keep animals in your house?"

"Couple of dogs. There's the stock, of course, but we don't let them in the house."

"Try keeping the dogs outside all the time and having your place well swept every day. That might stop your—uh—wheezing."

"You really think it would?"

"I do not know. Some people get the shortness of breath from dog hairs. Try it for a couple of months and see."

"I still think it's a curse, young fellow, but I'll try your scheme." He hesitated. "If you don't mind, what were you in your own country?"

Padway thought quickly, then remembered the few acres he owned in down-state Illinois. "I had a farm."

"That's fine," roared the Goth, clapping Padway on the back with staggering force. "I'm a friendly soul, but I don't want to get mixed up with people too far above or below my own class, ha, ha! My name is Nevitta; Nevitta Gummund's son. If you're passing up the Flaminian Way sometime, drop in. My place is about eight miles north of here."

"Thanks. My name is Martin Padway. Where would be a good place to rent a room?"

"That depends. If I didn't want to spend too much money, I'd pick a place farther down the river. Say, I'm in no hurry; I'll help you look." He whistled sharply and called: "*Hermann, hiri her!*"

Hermann, who was dressed much like his master, got up off the curb and trotted down the street leading two horses, his leather pants making a distinctive *flop-flop* as he ran.

Padway didn't want to impose on Nevitta's good nature, but he wanted the most useful information he could get. "Could you give me the names of a few people in Rome, lawyers and physicians and such, to go to when I need them?"

"Sure. If you want a lawyer specializing in cases involving foreigners, Valerius Mummius is your man. For a physician, try my friend Leo Vekkos. He's a good fellow, as Greeks go. But personally I think the relic of a good Arian saint is as effective as all their herbs and potations."

"It probably is at that," said Padway. He wrote the names and addresses in his date-book. "How about a banker?"

"I don't have much truck with them; hate the idea of getting in

debt. But if you want the name of one, there's Thomasus the Syrian, near the Aemilian Bridge."

Nevitta pounded on a door, which was opened by a frowsy superintendent.

This man had a room, yes. It was small and ill-lighted. It smelled. The superintendent wanted seven sesterces a day.

"Offer him half," said Nevitta to Padway.

Padway got the room for five sesterces.

Nevitta squeezed Padway's hand in his large red paw. "Don't forget, Martinus, come see me sometime. I always like to hear a man who speaks Latin with a worse accent than mine, ha, ha!" He and Hermann mounted and trotted off.

CHAPTER II

Padway awoke early with a bad taste in his mouth. Perhaps that was the dinner he'd eaten—not bad, but unfamiliar—consisting mainly of stew smothered in leeks.

One might very well sleep badly the first night on a bed consisting merely of a straw-stuffed mattress. And it had cost him an extra sesterce a day, too. An itch made him pull up his undershirt. Sure enough, a row of red spots on his midriff showed that he had not, after all, slept alone.

He got up and washed with the soap he had bought the previous evening. He had been pleasantly surprised to find that soap had already been invented. But when he broke a piece off the cake, which resembled a slightly decayed pumpkin pie, he found that the inside was soft and gooey because of incomplete potash-soda metathesis.

Then he made a determined effort to shave with olive oil and a sixth-century razor. The process was so painful that he wondered if it mightn't be better to let nature take its course.

He was in a tight fix, he knew. His money would last about a week.

If a man knew he was going to be whisked back into the past, he would load himself down with an encyclopedia, texts on metallurgy, mathematics, and medicine, a slide rule, and so forth. And a gun,

with plenty of ammunition.

But Padway had no gun, no encyclopedia, nothing but what an ordinary twentieth-century man carries in his pockets.

And he had his wits.

The problem was to find a way of using his twentieth-century knowledge that would support him without getting him into trouble.

The air was fairly warm, and he thought of leaving his hat and vest in the room. But the door had the simplest kind of ward lock, with a bronze key big enough to be presented by a mayor to a visiting dignitary. Padway was sure he could pick the lock with a knife blade. So he took all his clothes along.

He went back to the same restaurant for breakfast. The place had a sign over the counter reading, "RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS NOT ALLOWED." Padway asked the proprietor how to get to the address of Thomasus the Syrian.

Padway made him repeat it twice. Even so, it took most of the morning to find his objective. His walk took him past the Forum area, full of temples, most of whose columns had been removed for use in the five big and thirty-odd little churches scattered around the city.

Thomasus hung out in a shabby two-story building. He was a paunchy, bald man with a cataract on his left eye. He gathered his shabby robe about him, sat down, and said: "Well, young man?"

"I"—Padway swallowed and started again—"I'm interested in a loan."

"How much?"

"I don't know yet. I want to start a business and I'll have to investigate prices and things first."

"You want to start a new business? In Rome? *Hm-m-m.*" Thomasus rubbed his hands together. "What security can you give?"

"None at all."

"But . . . but, my dear sir, what about references?"

"I know a Gothic farmer named Nevitta Gummund's son. He sent me hither."

"Oh, yes, Nevitta. Would he go your note?"

Padway thought. "No," he said, "I don't think he would."

Thomasus shook his head and made clucking noises. "You certainly have plenty of self-confidence, young man. All right, what's your scheme?"

"Just arrived from a place called America. That's a long way off, and naturally it has a lot of customs and features different from those of Rome. Now if you could back me in the manufacture of some of our commodities that are not known here—"

"*Ai!*" yelped Thomasus, throwing up his hands. "Did You hear that, God? He wants me to start some newfangled line that nobody ever heard of! I couldn't think of such a thing, Martinus. What was it you had in mind?"

"Well, we have a drink made from wine, called brandy, that ought to go well."

"No, I couldn't consider it. Though I admit that Rome needs manufacturing establishments badly. When the capital was moved to Ravenna, all revenue from Imperial salaries was cut off, which is why the population has shrunk so the last century. But you can't get anybody to do anything about it. King Thiudahad spends his time writing Latin verse. Poetry! But no, young man, I couldn't put money into a wild project for the purpose of making some weird barbarian drink."

Padway's knowledge of sixth-century history was beginning to come back to him. "Speaking of Thiudahad, has Queen Amalaswentha been murdered yet?"

"Why"—Thomasus looked sharply at Padway with his good eye —"yes, she has." That meant that Justinian, the "Roman" emperor at Constantinople, would soon begin his disastrously successful effort to reconquer Italy for the Empire. "But why did you put your question that way?"

"What way?" asked Padway innocently.

"You asked whether she had been murdered *yet*. That sounds as though you had known ahead of time that she would be killed. Are you a soothsayer?"

"Not exactly. I heard before I came here that there had been trouble between the two Gothic sovereigns, and that Thiudahad would put his co-ruler out of the way if he had a chance. I—uh—just wondered how it came out, that's all."

"Yes," said the Syrian. "It was a shame. She was quite a woman. Good-looking, too, though she was in her forties. They caught her in her bath last summer and held her head under. Personally I think Thiudahad's wife Gudelinda put the old jellyfish up to it."

"Maybe she was jealous," said Padway. "Now about the manufacture of that barbarian drink, as you call it—"

"What? You have to be careful, doing business here in Rome. It's not like a growing town. Now if this were Constantinople—" He sighed. "You can really make money in the East. But I don't care to live there, with Justinian making life exciting for the heretics, as he calls them. What's your religion, by the way?"

"What's yours? Not that it makes any difference to me."

"Nestorian."

"Well," said Padway carefully, "I'm what we call a Congregationalist. That's the nearest thing we have to Nestorianism in my country. But about the manufacture of brandy—"

"Nothing doing, young man. Absolutely not. How much equipment would you need to start?"

"Oh, a big copper kettle and copper tubing and a stock of wine for the raw material. It wouldn't have to be good wine."

"I'm afraid it's too much of a gamble. I'm sorry."

"Look here, Thomasus, if I show you how you can halve the time it takes you to do your accounts, would you be interested?"

"You mean you're a mathematical genius or something?"

"No, but I have a system I can teach your clerks."

Thomasus closed his eyes like some Levantine Buddha. "Well—if you don't want more than fifty solidi—"

"All business is a gamble, you know."

"That's the trouble with it. But—I'll do it, *if* your accounting system is as good as you say it is."

"How about interest?" asked Padway.

"Three per cent."

"Three per cent per what?"

"Per month, of course."

"Too much. In my country, six per cent per year is considered fairly high."

"Young man, you ought to go live among the wild Saxons, to teach them something about piracy. But I like you, so I'll make it twenty-five per year."

"Still too much. I might consider seven and a half."

"You're being ridiculous. I wouldn't consider less than twenty for a minute."

"No. Nine per cent, perhaps."

"I'm not even interested. Too bad; it would have been nice to do business with you. Fifteen."

"That's out, Thomasus. Nine and a half."

"Did You hear that, God? He wants me to make him a present of my business! Twelve and a half. That's absolutely the bottom."

"Ten."

"Don't you understand Latin? I said that was the bottom. Good day; I'm glad to have met you." When Padway got up, the banker sucked his breath through his teeth and rasped: "Eleven."

"Ten and a half."

"Oh, very well. This sentimental generosity of mine will be my ruin yet. And now let's see that accounting system of yours."

An hour later, two chagrined clerks sat and regarded Padway with expressions of, respectively, wonderment, apprehension, and active hatred.

"All right. Give me a tablet." Padway scratched the numerals 1 to 9 in the wax, and explained them. "Now this is the important part." He drew a circle. "This is our character meaning *nothing*."

The younger clerk scratched his head. "It doesn't make sense to me. What is the use of a symbol for what does not exist?"

"You have a *word* for it, haven't you? And you find it useful, don't you?"

"I suppose so," said the older clerk. "But we don't use *nothing* in our calculations. Whoever heard of figuring the interest on a loan at no per cent? Or renting a house for no weeks?"

It took an hour to cover the elements of addition. Then Padway said the clerks had had enough for one day; they should practice addition for a while every day until they could do it faster than by Roman numerals.

"Very ingenious, Martinus," wheezed the banker. "And now for the details of that loan. Of course you weren't serious in setting such an absurdly low figure as ten and a half per cent—"

"What? You're damn right I was serious! And you agreed—"

"Now, Martinus. What I meant was that *after* my clerks had learned your system, if it was as good as you claimed, I'd consider lending you money at that rate. But meanwhile you've given my boys

their start; they can go alone from there if need be. So you might as well—"

"All right, you just let them try to go on from there. I'll find another banker and teach his clerks properly. Subtraction, multiplication, div—"

"*Ai!*" yelped Thomasus. "You can't go spreading this secret all over Rome! It wouldn't be fair to me!"

Padway got his loan at ten and a half. He agreed grudgingly not to reveal his arithmetic elsewhere until the first loan was paid off.

Padway bought a copper kettle at what he would have called a junk shop. But nobody had ever heard of copper tubing. After he and Thomasus had exhausted the second-hand metal shops between the latter's house and the warehouse district at the south end of town, he started in on coppersmiths' places. The coppersmiths had never heard of copper tubing, either. A couple of them offered to try to turn out some, but at astronomical prices.

"Martinus!" wailed the banker. "We've walked at least five miles, and my feet are giving out. Wouldn't lead pipe do just as well?"

"It would do fine except for one thing," said Padway, "we'd probably poison our customers. If I could hire a man who was generally handy with tools, and had some metal-working experience, I could show him how to make copper tubing. How do you go about hiring people here?"

"You don't," said Thomasus. "It just happens. You could buy a slave—but I shouldn't care to put up the price of a good slave into your venture. And it takes a skilled foreman to get enough work out of a slave to make him a profitable investment."

Padway said, "How would it be to put a sign in front of your place, stating that a position is open?"

"What?" squawked the banker.

"Now, Thomasus, don't get excited. It won't be a big sign and it'll be very artistic. I'll paint it myself."

"It won't work, I tell you. Most workmen can't read. And I won't have you demean yourself by manual labor that way. About how big a sign did you have in mind?"

Padway hired his man the third day after his first meeting with Thomasus the Syrian. The man was a dark cocky little Sicilian named Hannibal Scipio.

Padway had meanwhile taken a short lease on a tumbledown house on the Quirinal, and collected such equipment and personal effects as he thought he would need. He bought a short-sleeved tunic to wear over his pants, with the idea of making himself less conspicuous.

He whirled a mandrel out of wood and showed Hannibal Scipio how to bend the copper stripping around it. Hannibal claimed to know all that was necessary about soldering. But when Padway tried to bend the tubing into shape for his still, the seams popped open. After that Hannibal was a little less cocky—for a while.

Padway approached the great day of his first distillation with some apprehension. According to Tancredi's ideas, this was a new branch of the tree of time. But mightn't the professor have been wrong, so that, as soon as Padway did anything drastic enough to affect all subsequent history, he would make the birth of Martin Padway impossible, and disappear?

"Shouldn't there be an incantation or something?" asked Thomasus the Syrian.

"No," said Padway. "As I've already said three times, this isn't magic."

"It takes a long time, doesn't it?" asked Thomasus, rubbing his pudgy hands together nervously. His good eye glittered at the nozzle from which drop after yellow drop slowly dripped.

"I think that's enough," said Padway. "We'll get mostly water if we continue the run." He directed Hannibal to remove the kettle and poured the contents of the receiving flash into a bottle. "I'd better try it first." he said. He poured out a little into a cup, sniffed, and took a swallow.

It was definitely not good brandy. But it would do.

"Have some?" he said to the banker.

"Well," said Thomasus, "if you're sure it won't hurt me, I might take just a little." He took just a little, then coughed violently. "Good God, man, what are your insides made of? That's volcano juice!" As his coughing subsided, a saintlike expression appeared. "It does warm you nicely inside, though, doesn't it?" He finished the cup in one gulp.

"Hey," said Padway. "Go easy. That isn't wine."

"Oh, don't worry about me. Nothing makes me drunk."

Padway got out another cup and sat down. "Maybe you can tell me one thing that I haven't got straight yet. In my country, we reckon years from the birth of Christ. When I asked a man, the day I arrived, what year it was, he said 1288 after the founding of the city. Can you tell me how many years before Christ Rome was founded?"

Thomasus took another slug of brandy and thought. "Seven hundred and fifty-four—no, 753. That means that this is the year of our Lord 535. That's the system the church uses. The Goths say the second year of Thiudahad's reign, and the Byzantines the first year of the consulship of Flavius Belisarius. I can see how it might confuse you." He drank some more. "This is a wonderful invention, isn't it?"

"Thanks. I hope so."

"Wonderful invention. Course it'll be a success. Are You listening, God? Well, make sure my friend Martinus has a big success. Success—success—let's drink to success. I know what, Martinus. Let's go some place where there's music. Bring the bottle along."

The joint was in the theater district on the north side of the Capitoline. The "music" was furnished by a young woman who twanged a harp and sang songs in Calabrian dialect.

"Let's drink to—" Thomasus started to say "success" for the thirtieth time, but changed his mind. "Say, Martinus, we'd better buy some of this lousy wine or he'll have us thrown out. Just a minute, old friend, I see a man who owes me money. I'll be right back." He waddled unsteadily across the room.

A man at the next table asked Padway suddenly: "What's that stuff you and old one-eye have been drinking, friend?"

"Oh, just a foreign drink called brandy," said Padway uneasily.

"That's right, you're a foreigner, aren't you? I can tell by your accent. I know; you're a Persian. I know a Persian accent."

"Not exactly," said Padway. "Farther away than that."

"That so? How do you like Rome?" The man had very large and very black eyebrows.

"Fine, so far," said Padway.

"Well, you haven't seen anything," said the man. "It hasn't been the same since the Goths came."

"You don't like the Goths?"

"No! Not with the religious persecution we have to put up with!"

"I thought the Goths let everybody worship as they pleased."

"That's just it! We Orthodox are forced to stand around and watch Arians and Monophysites and Nestorians and Jews going about their business unmolested, as if they owned the country. If that isn't persecution, I'd like to know what is!"

"You mean that you're persecuted because the heretics and such are not?"

"Certainly, isn't that obvious? What's your religion, by the way?"

"Well," said Padway, "I'm what in my country is called a Congregationalist. That's the nearest thing to Orthodoxy that we have."

"So long as you're not one of these Maronites or Nestorians—"

"What's that about Nestorians?" said Thomasus, who had returned unobserved. "We who have the only logical view of the nature of the Son—that He was a man in whom the Father indwelt—"

"Nonsense! That's what you expect of half-baked amateur theologians. Our view—that of the dual nature of the Son—has been irrefutably shown—"

"You're all crazy!" rumbled a tall, sad-looking man with thin yellow hair, watery blue eyes, and a heavy accent. "We Arians abhor theological controversy, being sensible men. But if you want a sensible view of the nature of the Son—"

"You're a Goth?" barked Eyebrows tensely.

"No, I'm a Vandal, exiled from Africa. But as I was saying—"

Eyebrows jumped up and began yelling like one possessed. Padway couldn't follow him, except to note that the term "infamous heretics" occurred about once per sentence. Yellow Hair roared back at him, and other men began shouting from various parts of the room: "This is an Orthodox country, and those who don't like it can go back where they—" "Damned nonsense about dual natures! We Monophysites—"

The room was a blur of action. Eyebrows was holding the self-styled Jacobite by the hair and punching his face; Yellow Hair was swinging four feet of bench around his head and howling a Vandal battle song. He located Thomasus the Syrian under a table. When he tried to drag him out, the banker shrieked with terror and hugged the table leg as if it were a woman and he a sailor who had been six months at sea. Padway finally got him untangled.

The yellow-haired Vandal was still swinging his bench. Padway shouted at him. The man couldn't have understood in the uproar, but his attention was attracted, and when Padway pointed at the door he got the idea. In a few seconds he had cleared a path. The three stumbled out, pushed through the crowd that was beginning to gather outside, and ran.

They finally sat down on a park bench on the edge of the Field of Mars, only a few blocks from the Pantheon, where Padway had his first sight of post-Imperial Rome. Thomasus, when he got his breath, said: "Martinus, why did you let me drink so much of that heathen drink? If I hadn't been drunk, I'd have had more sense than to start a theological argument."

"I tried to slow you down, but you—"

"I know, I know. But you should have prevented me from drinking so much, forcibly if necessary. My head! What will my wife say? I never want to see that lousy barbarian drink again! What did you do with the bottle, by the way?"

"It got lost in the scuffle. But there wasn't much left in it anyway." Padway turned to the Vandal. "I guess I owe you some thanks for getting us out of there so quickly."

The man pulled his drooping mustache. "I was glad to do it, friend. Religious argument is no occupation for decent people. Permit me; my name is Fritharik Staifan's son. Once I was counted a man of noble family. Now I am merely a poor wanderer." Padway saw a tear glistening in the moonlight.

"You said you were a Vandal?"

Fritharik sighed. "Yes, mine was one of the finest estates in Carthage, before the Greeks came. When King Gelimer ran away, and our army scattered, I escaped to Spain, and thence I came hither last year."

"What are you doing now?"

"I had a job as bodyguard to a Roman patrician until last week. Think of it—a noble Vandal serving as bodyguard! But my employer got set on the idea of converting me to Orthodoxy. That," said Fritharik with dignity, "I would not allow. You aren't looking for a good, reliable bodyguard, are you?"

"Not just now," said Padway, "but I may be in a few weeks."

"Very well, friend. I shall probably be in a nameless lonely suicides' grave before two weeks have passed. But if not, I'll be around."

CHAPTER III

At the end of the week, Padway was gratified not only by the fact that he had not vanished into thin air, and by the appearance of the row of bottles on the shelf, but by the state of his finances. Counting the five solidi for the first month's rent on the house, the six more that had gone into his apparatus, and Hannibal's wages and his own living expenses, he still had over thirty of his fifty borrowed solidi left.

Padway said, "It's a luxury article, obviously. If we can get some of the better-class restaurants to stock it, I don't see why we shouldn't get two solidi per bottle. At least until somebody discovers our secret and begins competing with us."

Thomasus rubbed his hands together. "At that rate, you could practically pay back your loan with the proceeds of the first week's sales. But I'm in no hurry; it might be better to reinvest them in the business. I think I know the restaurant we should start with."

Padway experienced a twinge of dread at the idea of trying to sell the restaurateur the idea. He was not a born salesman and he knew it. "How should I go about getting him to buy? I'm not very familiar with your Roman business methods."

"That's all right. He won't refuse, because he owes me money, and he's behind in his interest payments."

The restaurant owner glowered a bit at first. Padway fed him a little brandy by way of a sample, and he agreed to the price for half a dozen bottles.

Padway glowed visibly as they emerged from the restaurant, his pockets pleasantly heavy with gold.

"I think," said Thomasus, "you had better hire that Vandal chap, if you're going to have money around the house."

So when Hannibal Scipio told Padway, "There's a tall, gloomy-looking bird outside who says you said to come see you," he had the Vandal sent in and hired him almost at once.

Padway decided to knock off on his fifth Sunday in Rome. For almost a month he had been working all day and most of the night, helping Hannibal run the still, clean it, and unload casks of wine; and seeing restaurateurs who had received inquiries from their customers about this remarkable new drink.

In an economy of scarcity, he reflected, you didn't have to turn handsprings finding new customers, once your commodity caught on. He was meditating striking Thomasus for a loan to build another still.

Just now, though, he was heartily sick of the business. He wanted fun, which to him meant the Ulpian librarian. As he looked in the mirror, he thought he hadn't changed much inside. He disliked barging in on strangers and bargaining as much as ever. But outside, none of his former friends would have known him. He had grown a short reddish beard. He wore another new tunic, a Byzantine-style thing with ballooning sleeves. The trousers of his tweed suit gave an incongruous effect, but he didn't fancy the short pants of the country, with winter coming on. He also wore a cloak, which was nothing but a big square blanket with a hole in the middle to put his head through.

He approached the library with much the same visceral tingle that a lover gets from the imminence of a meeting with his beloved. Nor was he disappointed. He felt like shouting when a brief nosing about the shelves showed him Berosus *Chaldean History*, the complete works of Livius, Tacitus' *History of the Conquest of Britain*, and Cassiodorus' recently published *Gothic History* complete. Here was stuff for which more than one twentieth-century historian or archaeologist would cheerfully commit murder.

He decided that Cassiodorus would have the most valuable information to impart, as it dealt with an environment in which he himself was living. So he lugged the big volumes out and set to work.

"Excuse me, sir," said the librarian, "but is that tall barbarian with the yellow mustache your man?"

"I suppose so," said Padway. "What is it?"

"He's gone to sleep in the Oriental section, and he's snoring so that the readers are complaining."

"I'll tend to him," said Padway.

He went over and awakened Fritharik. "Can't you read?"

"No," said Fritharik. "Why should I? When I had my beautiful estate in Africa, there was no occasion—"

"Yes, but you'll have to learn to read, or else do your snoring outside."

When Padway got back to his table, he found an elderly Italian dressed with simple elegance going through his Cassiodorus. The man looked up and said: "I'm sorry; were you reading these?"

"That's all right," said Padway. "I wasn't reading all of them. If you're not using the first volume . . ."

"Certainly, certainly, my dear young man. And what, may I ask, do you think of the work of our illustrious pretorian prefect?"

"That depends," said Padway judiciously. "He has a lot of facts you can't get elsewhere. But I prefer my facts with less flowery rhetoric."

"Oh, but my dear, dear young man! Just consider the delicate imagery, the glorious erudition! Such style! Such wit!"

"That's just the trouble. You can't give me Julius Cæsar—"

"Julius Cæsar! Why, everybody knows *he* couldn't write! They use his *Gallic War* as an elementary Latin text for foreigners! All very well for the skin-clad barbarian, who through the gloomy fastnesses of the northern forests pursues the sanguinary boar and horrid bear. Oh"—he looked embarrassed—"you will understand that in my remarks on foreigners I meant nothing personal. I perceive that you are an outlander, despite your obvious breeding and erudition. Are you by any chance from the fabled land of Hind, with its pearl-decked maidens and its elephants?"

"No, farther away than that," said Padway. He knew he had flushed a literary Roman patrician, of the sort who couldn't ask you to pass the butter without wrapping the request in three puns, four mythological illusions, and a dissertation on the manufacture of butter in ancient Crete. "A place called America. I doubt whether I shall ever return, though."

"Ah, how right you are! Why should one live anywhere but in Rome if one can? But perhaps you can tell me of the wonders of far-off China, with its gold-paved streets!"

"I can tell you a little about it," said Padway cautiously. "For one thing, the streets aren't gold-paved. In fact, they're mostly not paved at all."

"How disappointing! But I daresay that a truthful traveler returning from heaven would pronounce its wonders grossly overrated. We must get together, my excellent young sir. I am Cornelius Anicius."

Padway introduced himself.

A pretty slim dark girl approached, addressed Anicius as "Father," and said that she had not been able to find the Sabellian edition of Persius Flaccus.

"Somebody is using it, no doubt," said Anicius. "Martinus, this is my daughter Dorothea. A veritable pearl from King Khusrau's headdress of a daughter, though I as her father may be prejudiced." The girl smiled sweetly at Padway and excused herself.

Anicius asked: "And now, my dear young man, what is your occupation?"

Without thinking, Padway said he was in business.

"Indeed? What sort of business?"

Padway told him. The patrician froze up.

"Well, well, that's interesting. Very interesting. I suppose we aren't to blame for the callings wherein God stations us. But it's too bad you haven't tried the public service. That is the only way to rise above one's class. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll do some reading."

Padway had been hoping for an invitation to Anicius' house. But now that Anicius knew him to be a mere vulgar manufacturer, no invitation would be forthcoming. Padway went out and awoke Fritharik.

The Vandal yawned. "Find all the books you wanted, Martinus? I was just dreaming of my beautiful estate—"

"To hell with—" barked Padway, then shut his mouth.

"What?" said Fritharik. "Can't I even dream about the time I was rich and respected? That's not very—"

"Nothing, nothing. I didn't mean you."

"I'm glad of that. My one consolation nowadays is my memories. But what are you so angry at, Martinus? You look as if you could bite nails in two. It must have been something in those books. I'm glad I never learned to read."

Padway and Thomasus the Syrian sat, along with several hundred naked Romans, in the steam room of the Baths of Diocletian.

Thomasus said. "I've got a letter from my cousin Antiochus in Naples. He's in the shipping business. He has news from Constantinople." He paused impressively. "War."

"Between us and the Empire?"

"Between the Goths and the Empire, anyway. They've been carrying on mysterious dickerings ever since Amalaswentha was killed. Thiudahad has tried to duck responsibility for the murder, but I think our old poet-king has come to the end of his rope."

Padway said: "Watch Dalmatia and Sicily. Before the end of the year—" He stopped.

"Doing a bit of soothsaying?"

"No, just an opinion."

The good eye sparkled at Padway through the steam, very black and very intelligent. "Martinus, just who are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You produce the most astounding bits of knowledge, like a magician pulling rabbits out of his cap. And when I try to pump you about your own country or how you came hither, you change the subject."

"Well—" said Padway, wondering just how big a lie to risk. Then he thought of the perfect answer—a truthful one that Thomasus would be sure to misconstrue. "You see, I left my own country in a great hurry."

"Oh. For reasons of health, eh? I don't blame you for being cagy in that case." Thomasus winked.

When they were walking up Long Street toward Padway's house, Thomasus asked how the business was. Padway told him: "Pretty good. The new still will be ready next week. And I sold some copper strip to a merchant leaving for Spain. By the way, I'm going to pay off your loan when we get home."

"Entirely?"

"That's right. The money's in the strong box waiting for you."

"Splendid, my dear Martinus! But won't you need another?"

"I'm not sure," said Padway, who was certain he would. "I was thinking of expanding my distillery."

"That's a great idea. Of course, now that you're established, we'll put our loans on a business basis—"

"Meaning?" said Padway.

"Meaning that the rate of interest will have to be adjusted. The normal rate, you know, is much higher—"

"That's what I thought you had in mind. But now that you know the business is a safe one, you can afford to give me a lower rate."

"Listen to him, God! It's robbery! I'll never give in!"

Three blocks of argument brought the interest rate down to ten per cent, which Thomasus said was cutting his own heart out and burning it on the altar of friendship.

When they entered his big workshop, they found Fritharik and Hannibal glaring like a couple of dogs who dislike each other's smell.

Hannibal whipped out a dagger and lunged at Fritharik. He moved with rattlesnake speed, but he used the instinctive but tactfully unsound overhand stab. Fritharik, who was unarmed, caught his wrist with a smack of flesh on flesh, then lost it as Hannibal dug his point into the Vandal's forearm.

When Hannibal swung his arm up for another stab, Padway arrived and caught his arm. He hauled the little man away from his opponent, and immediately had to hang on to keep from being stabbed himself. Hannibal was shrieking in Sicilian patois and, foaming a little at the mouth.

Then there was a thump, and Hannibal collapsed, dropping his dagger. Padway let him slide to the floor, and saw that Nerva, the older of the two assistants, was holding a stool by one leg. Fritharik was bending over to pick up a short piece of board for a weapon.

Padway said to Nerva: "I think you're the man for my next foreman. What's this about, Fritharik?"

Fritharik didn't answer; he stalked toward the unconscious Hannibal with murder in his face.

"That's enough, Fritharik!" said Padway sharply. "No more rough stuff, or you're fired, too! What was he doing?"

The Vandal came to himself. "He was stealing bits of copper from stock and selling them. I tried to get him to stop without telling you; you know how it is if your fellow employees think you're spying on them. Let me have one whack at him."

Padway refused permission. Thomasus suggested swearing out a complaint and having Hannibal arrested; Padway said no, he didn't want to get mixed up with the law. He did allow Fritharik to send

Hannibal, when the Sicilian came to, out the front door with a mighty kick.

Fritharik said: "I could have sunk his body in the Timber without anybody's knowing. He'll make trouble for us."

Padway said: "We'd better bind your arm up. Your whole sleeve is blood-soaked: Get a strip of linen and boil it. Yes, *boil* it!"

CHAPTER IV

Padway had resolved not to let anything distract him from the task of assuring himself a livelihood. But the banker's war talk reminded him that he was, after all, living in a political and cultural as well as an economic world. He had never. in his other life, paid more attention to current events than he had to. And in post-Imperial Rome, with no newspapers or electrical communication, it was even easier to forget about things outside one's immediate orbit.

He was living in the twilight of western classical civilization. The Age of Faith, better known as the Dark Ages.

So what? Could one man change the course of history to the extent of prcventing this interregnum? Tancredi had expressed it differently by calling history a tough web, which would take a huge effort to distort.

How would one man go about it? And how much could he accomplish by simply "inventing," even if he escaped the unwelcome attentions of the pious? The arts of distilling and metal rolling were launched, no doubt, and so were Arabic numerals. But there was so much to be done, and only one lifetime to do it in.

What then? Business? He was already in it; the upper classes were contemptuous of it; and he was not naturally a businessman. Politics? In an age when victory went to the sharpest knife and no moral rules of conduct were observable?

How to prevent darkness from falling?

The Empire might have held together longer if it had had better means of communication. But the Empire at least in the west, was hopelessly smashed, with Italy, Gaul and Spain under the muscular thumbs of their barbarian "garrisons."

The answer was *Rapid communication and the multiple record*—that is, printing. Not even the most diligently destructive barbarian can extirpate too many books.

So he would be a printer. The web might be tough, but maybe it had never been attacked by a Martin Padway.

"Good morning, my dear Martinus," said Thomasus. "How is the copper-rolling business?"

"So-so. The local smiths are pretty well stocked with strip, and not many of the shippers are interested in paying my prices for such a heavy commodity. But I think I'll clean up that last note in a few weeks."

"I'm glad to hear that. What will you do then?"

"That's what I came to see you about. Who's publishing books in Rome now?"

"Books? Nobody, unless you count the copyists who replace worn-out copies for the libraries. You're not thinking of going into it, I hope?"

"Yes, I am. I'll make money at it, too. But I'll need some capital to start."

"What? Another loan? But I've just told you that nobody can make money publishing in Rome. I won't lend on such a harebrained scheme. How much do you think you'd need?"

"About five hundred solidi."

"*Ai, ai!* You've gone mad! What would you need such a lot for? All you have to do is hire a couple of scribes—"

Padway grinned. "It takes a scribe months to copy out a work like Cassiodorus' *Gothic History* by hand, and costs fifty solidi per copy. I can build a machine that will turn out five hundred or a thousand copies in a few weeks, to retail for five or ten solidi. But it will take time and money to build the machine and teach an operator how to run it."

"For the last time, Martinus, I won't consider it! How does the machine work?"

If Padway had known the travail that was in store for him, he might have been less confident about the responsibilities of starting a printshop in a world that knew neither printing presses, type, printer's ink, nor paper.

His press, seemingly the most formidable job, proved the easiest.

For a bed, they used a piece sawn off the top of a section of a broken marble column and mounted on wheels. All Padway's instincts revolted at this use of a monument of antiquity, but he consoled himself with the thought that one column mattered less than the art of printing.

For type, he contracted with a seal cutter to cut him a set of brass types. He had, at first, been appalled to discover that he would need ten to twelve thousand of the little things, since he could hardly build a type-casting machine and would therefore have to print directly from the type. He had hoped to be able to print in Greek and Gothic as well as in Latin, but the Latin types alone set him back a round two hundred solidi.

Padway shrank from the idea of making his own paper. He had only a hazy idea of how it was done, except that it was a complicated process. Papyrus was too glossy and brittle, and the supply in Rome was meager and uncertain.

There remained vellum. Padway found that one of the tanneries across the Tiber turned out small quantities as a side line. It was made from the skins of sheep and goats by extensive scraping, washing, stretching, and paring. Padway staggered the owner of the tannery by ordering a thousand sheets at one crack.

He was fortunate in knowing that printer's ink was based on linseed oil and lampblack. The only thing wrong was that it wouldn't print. That is, it either made no impression or came off the type in shapeless gobs. But he grimly set out to experiment on his ink. Sure enough he found that with a little soap in it, it would work fairly well.

In the middle of February, Nevitta Gummund's son wandered in through the raw drizzle. "Well, well!" he bellowed. "Somebody gave me some of that terrific drink you've been selling, and I remembered your name. So I thought I'd look you up. Say, you got yourself well established in record time, for a stranger."

"Would you like to look around?" invited Padway. "Only I'll have to ask you to keep my methods confidential. There's no law here protecting ideas, so I have to keep my things secret until I'm ready to make them public property."

"Sure, you can trust me. I wouldn't understand how your devices

work anyhow. Where do you get your power?" asked Nevitta.

Padway showed him the work-horse in the back yard walking around a shaft in the rain.

"Shouldn't think a horse would be efficient," said the Goth. "You could get a lot more power out of a couple of husky slaves."

"Oh, no," said Padway. "Not this horse. Notice anything peculiar about his harness?"

"Well, yes, it *is* peculiar. But I don't know what's wrong with it."

"It's that collar over his neck. You people make your horses pull against a strap around the throat. Every time he pulls, the strap cuts into his windpipe and shuts off the poor animal's breath. That collar puts the load on his shoulders. If you were going to pull a load, you wouldn't hitch a rope around your neck to pull it with, would you?"

"Well," said Nevitta dubiously, "maybe you're right. I've been using my kind of harness for a long time, and I don't know that I'd care to change."

Padway shrugged. "Any time you want one of these outfits, you can get it from Metellus the Saddler on the Appian Way. He made this to my specifications. I'm not making them myself; I have too much else to do."

Here Padway leaned against the doorframe and closed his eyes.

"Aren't you feeling well?" asked Nevitta in alarm.

"No. My head weighs as much as the dome of the Pantheon. I think I'm going to bed."

"*Hermann!*" When Hermann appeared, Nevitta rattled a sentence of Gothic at him wherein Padway caught the name of Leo Vekkos.

Padway protested: "I don't want a physician—"

"Nonsense, my boy, it's no trouble. You were right about keeping the dogs outside. It cured my wheezes. So, I'm glad to help you."

Padway feared the ministrations of a sixth-century physician more than he feared the grippe with which he was coming down. Nevitta and Fritharik got him to bed with rough efficiency.

"Look," said Padway, "I know what's wrong with me. If everybody will let me alone, I'll get well in a week or ten days."

While they were arguing, Hermann arrived with a sallow, black-bearded, sensitive-looking man.

Leo Vekkos opened his bag. Padway got a glimpse into the bag, and shuddered. It contained a couple of books, an assortment of

weeds, and several small bottles holding organs of what had probably been small mammals.

"Now then, excellent Martinus," said Vekkos. "let me see your tongue. Say ah." The physician felt Padway's forehead, poked his chest and stomach, and asked him intelligent-sounding questions about his condition.

"This is a common condition in winter," said Vekkos in a didactic tone. "Some hold it to be an excess of blood in the head, which causes that stuffy feeling whereof you complain. Others assert that it is an excess of black bile. I hold the view that it is caused by the conflict of the natural spirits of the liver with the animal spirits of the nervous system. The defeat of the animal spirits naturally reacts on the respiratory system—"

"It's nothing but a bad cold—" said Padway.

Vekkos held up a bunch of weeds. "Have these herbs stewed and drink a cupful every three hours. They include a mild purgative, to draw off the black bile in case there should be an excess."

"Which is the purgative?" asked Padway.

Vekkos pulled it out. Padway's thin arm shot out and grabbed the weed. "I just want to keep this separate from the rest, if you don't mind."

Next morning his head was less thick. but he felt very tired. He slept until eleven, when he was wakened by Julia, the maid. With Julia was a dignified man wearing an ordinary civilian cloak over a long white tunic with tight sleeves.

"My son," said the priest. "I am sorry to see that the Devil has set his henchmen on you. This virtuous young woman besought my spiritual aid. I know that you have consulted the physician Vekkos. How much better it is to put your trust in God, compared to whose power these bleeders and stewers of herbs are impotent! We shall start with a few prayers. . . ."

Padway lived through it. Then Julia appeared, stirring something.

"Don't be alarmed," said the priest. "This is one cure that never fails. Dust from the tomb of St. Nereus, mixed with water."

Fritharik put his head in. "That so-called physician is here to see you again."

"Tell him just a moment," said Padway. God, he was tired. "Thanks a lot, Father. It's nice to have seen you."

The priest went out, shaking his head over the blindness of mortals who trusted in *materia medica.*

Vekkos came in with an accusing look. Padway said: "Don't blame me. The girl brought him."

Vekkos sighed. "We physicians spend our lives in hard scientific study, and then we have to compete with these alleged miracle-workers. Well, how's my patient today?"

While he was still examining Padway, Thomasus the Syrian appeared. The banker waited around nervously until the Greek left. Then Thomasus said: "I came as soon as I heard you were sick, Martinus. Prayers and medicines are all very well, but my colleague, Ebenezer, knows a man named Jeconias of Naples, who is good at curative magic."

"I don't want him," groaned Padway. "I'll be all right if everybody will stop trying to cure me . . ."

"I brought him along, Martinus. Now do be reasonable. I couldn't afford to have you die with those notes outstanding."

Jeconias of Naples was a little fat man with a bouncing manner, more like a high-pressure salesman than the conventional picture of a magician.

He chattered. "Now just leave everything to me, excellent Martinus. Here's a little cantrip that'll scare off the weaker spirits." He pulled out a piece of papyrus and read off something in an unknown language. "Now we'll put this charm under the bed. There, don't you feel better already? Now, we'll cast your horoscope. If you'll give me the date and hour of your birth . . ."

How the hell, thought Padway, could he explain to this damned little quack that he was going to be born 1,373 years hence?

"Shemkhamphoras!" yelled Padway. "Ashtaroth! Baal-Marduk! St. Frigidaire! Tippecanoe and Tyler too! Begone, worm! One word from you of my true identity and I'll strike you down with the foulest form of leprosy! Your eyeballs will rot, your fingers will drop off joint by joint—"

But Jeconias was already out the door. Padway could hear him negotiate the first half of the stairway three steps at a time and race out the front door.

Padway chuckled. He told Fritharik, who had been attracted by the noise: "You park yourself at the door with your sword and say

that Vekkos has given orders to let nobody see me. And I mean *nobody.*"

It was now April, 536. Sicily had fallen to General Belisarius in December. Padway had heard this weeks after it happened. Except for business errands, he had hardly been outside his house in four months in his desperate anxiety to get his press going. And except for his workers and his business contacts, he knew practically nobody in Rome, though he had a speaking acquaintance with the librarians and two of Thomasus' banker friends, Ebenezer the Jew and Vardan the Armenian.

"Well, well," said Thomasus, "that's splendid. I always knew you'd get your machine to run. Said so right from the start. What are you going to print? The *Gothic History?* That would flatter the pretorian prefect, no doubt."

"No. That would take months to run off, especially as my men are new at the job. I'm starting off with a little alphabet book."

"That sounds like a good idea. But, Martinus, can't you let your men handle it and take a rest? You look as if you hadn't had a good night's sleep in months."

"I haven't, to tell the truth. But I can't leave; every time something goes wrong, I have to be there to fix it. Also, I have an idea for another kind of publication."

"What? Don't tell me you're going to start another wild scheme—"

"Now, now, don't get excited, Thomasus. This is a weekly booklet of news."

"Listen, Martinus, don't overreach yourself. You'll get the scribes' guild down on you. As it is, I wish you'd tell me more about yourself. You're the town's great mystery, you know."

"You just tell them I'm the most uninteresting bore you ever met in your life."

There were only a little over a hundred free-lance scribes in Rome. Padway disarmed any hostility they might have had for him by enlisting them as reporters. He made a standing offer of a couple of sesterces per story for acceptable accounts of news items.

When he came to assemble the copy for his first issue, he found that some drastic censorship was necessary. For instance, one story read:

Our depraved and licentious city governor, Count Honorius, was seen early Wednesday morning being pursued down Broad Way by a young woman with a butcher's cleaver. Because this cowardly wretch was not encumbered by a decent minimum of clothing, he outdistanced his pursuer. This is the fourth time in a month that the wicked and corrupt count has created a scandal by his conduct with women. It is rumored that King Thiudahad will be petitioned to remove him by a committee of the outraged fathers of daughters whom he has dishonored. It is to be hoped that the next time the diabolical count is chased with a cleaver, his pursuer will catch him.

Padway, didn't know Honorius, but whether the story was true or not, there was no free-press clause in the Italian constitution between Padway and the city's torture chambers. So the first eight-page issue said nothing about young women with cleavers. It had a lot of relatively innocuous news items.

Padway turned the crackling sheepskin pages of the proof copy, was proud of himself and his men, a pride not much diminished by the immediate discovery of a number of glaring typographical errors. With only two hundred and fifty copies, he could have somebody go through them and correct the errors with pen and ink.

Padway called his paper *Tempora Romae* and offered it at ten sesterces, about the equivalent of fifty cents. He was surprised when not only did the first issue sell out, but Fritharik was busy for three days turning away from his door people who wanted copies that were not to be had.

A few scribes dropped in every day with more news items. One of them handed in a story beginning:

The blood of an innocent man has been sacrificed to the lusts of our vile monster of a city governor, Count Honorius.

"Hey!" said Padway. "Aren't you the man who handed in that other story about Honorius and a cleaver?"

"That's right," said the scribe. "I wondered why you didn't publish it."

"How long do you think I'd be allowed to run my paper without interference if I did?"

"Oh, I never thought of that."

"It's too bad I don't dare run a gossip column," said Padway. "But you seem to have the makings of a newspaper man. What's your name?"

"George Menandrus."

"All right, George, keep in touch with me. Some day I may want

to hire an assistant to help run the thing."

Padway confidently visited the tanner to place another order for vellum.

"You practically cleaned out Rome's supply with that first order," said the tanner. "There aren't enough skins left in the whole city to make a hundred sheets. And making vellum takes time, you know. If you buy up the last fifty sheets, it will be weeks before you can prepare another large batch."

It would have to be paper after all. And his second edition was going to be very, very late.

He got hold of a felter and told him that he wanted him to chop up a few pounds of white cloth and make them into the thinnest felt that anybody had ever heard of. After many trials, the man presented him with a paper not much worse for writing than a twentieth-century paper towel.

Then came the heartbreaking part. A drop of ink applied to this paper spread out with the alacrity of a picnic party that has discovered a rattlesnake in their midst. So Padway told the felter to make up ten more sheets, and into the mush from which each was made to introduce one common stubstance—soap. olive oil, and so forth. At this point the felter threatened to quit, and had to be appeased by a raise in price. Padway was vastly relieved to discover that a little clay mixed with the pulp made all the difference between a fair writing paper and an impossible one.

By the time Padway's second issue had been sold out, he had ceased to worry about the possibility of running a paper. But another thought moved into the vacated worrying compartment in his mind: What should he do when the Gothic War really got going? In his own history, it had raged for twenty years up and down Italy. Nearly every important town had been besieged or captured at least once. Rome itself would be practically depopulated by sieges, famine and pestilence. If he lived long enough, he might see the Lombard invasion and the near-extinction of Italian civilization. All this would interfere dreadfully with his plans.

He was surprised when Fritharik brought in Thomasus' colleague, Ebenezer the Jew. Ebenezer was a frail-looking, kindly oldster with a long white beard.

He took his rain-soaked cloak off over his head and asked: "Where can I put this where it won't drip, excellent Martinus? Thank you. I was this way on business and I thought I'd look your place over, if I may. It must be interesting, from Thomasus' accounts."

Padway was glad of something to take his mind off the ominous future. He showed the old man around.

Ebenezer looked at him from under bushy white eyebrows. "Ah. Now I can believe that you are from a far country. Take that system of arithmetic of yours; it has changed our whole concept of banking—"

"What?" cried Padway. "What do you know about it?"

"Why, Thomasus sold the secret to Vardan and me. I thought you knew that."

"He *did?* How much."

"A hundred and fifty solidi apiece, Didn't you—"

Padway grabbed his hat and cloak, and started for the door.

"Where are you going, Martinus?" said Ebenezer in alarm.

"I'm going to tell that cutthroat what I think of him!"

"Did Thomasus promise you not to reveal the secret? I cannot believe that he violated—"

Padway stopped with his hand on the door handle. Now that he thought, he saw that he had not really lost anything, since his original intention had been to spread Arabic numerals far and wide. What really peeved him was that Thomasus should chisel such a handsome sum out of the science without even offering Padway a cut.

When Padway did appear at Thomasus' house, later that day, he had Fritharik with him, carrying a strong box, heavy with gold.

"Martinus," cried Thomasus, a little appalled, "do you really want to pay off all your loans? Where did you get all this money?"

"Here's an accounting of principal and interest. I'm tired of paying ten per cent when I can get the same for seven and a half."

"What? Where can you get any such absurd rate?"

"From your esteemed colleague, Ebenezer."

"Well, I must say I wouldn't have expected that of Ebenezer. If all this is true, I suppose I could meet his rate."

"You'll have to better it, after what you made from selling my arithmetic."

"Now, Martinus, what I did was strictly legal—"

"Didn't say it wasn't."

"Oh, very well. I'll give you seven and four-tenths."

Padway laughed scornfully.

"Seven, then. But that's the lowest, absolutely, positively, finally."

When Padway had received his old notes, a receipt for the old loans, and a copy of the new note, Thomasus asked him, "How did you get Ebenezer to offer you such an unheard-of-figure?"

Padway smiled. "I told him that he could have had the secret of the new arithmetic from me for the asking."

Nevitta popped in again. "All over your sickness, Martinus? Fine; I knew you had a sound constitution. How about coming out to the Flaminian racetrack with me now and losing a few solidi? Then come on up to the farm overnight."

"I'd like to, but I have to put the *Times* to bed this afternoon."

"Put to bed?" queried Nevitta.

Padway explained.

Nevitta said: "I see. Ha, ha, I thought you had a girl friend named Tempora. Tomorrow for supper, then."

"How shall I get there?"

"You haven't a saddle horse? I'll send Hermann down with one tomorrow afternoon."

So the next afternoon Padway, in a new pair of rawhide Byzantine jack boots, set out with Hermann up the Flamian Way. The Roman Campagna, he noted, was still fairly prosperous farming country. He wondered how long it would take for it to become the desolate, malarial plain of the Middle Ages.

"How were the races?" he asked.

Hermann, it seemed, knew very little Latin, though that little was still better than Padway's Gothic. "Oh, my boss . . . he terrible angry. He talk . . . you know . . . hot sport. But hate lose money. Lose fifty sesterces on horse. Make noise like . . . you know . . . lion with gutache."

At the farmhouse Padway met Nevitta's wife, a pleasant, plump woman who spoke no Latin, and his eldest son, Dagalaif, a Gothic *scaio,* or marshal, home on vacation. Supper fully bore out the stories that Padway had heard about Gothic appetites. He was agreeably surprised to drink some fairly good beer, after the bilge-

water that went by that name in Rome.

"I've got some wine, if you prefer it," said Nevitta.

"Thanks, but I'm getting a little tired of Italian wine. The Roman writers talk a lot about their different kinds, but it all tastes alike to me."

Dagalaif spoke up: "Say, Martinus, maybe you have inside information on how the war will go."

Padway shrugged. "All I know is what everybody else knows. I haven't a private wire—I mean a private channel of information to heaven. If you want a guess, I'd say that Belisarius would invade Bruttium this summer and besiege Naples about August. He won't have a large force, but he'll be infernally hard to beat."

Dagalaif said: "Huh! A handful of Greeks won't get very far against the united Gothic nation."

"That's what the Vandals thought."

"*Aiw,*" said Dagalaif. "But we won't make the mistake the Vandals made."

"I don't know, son," said Nevitta. "It seems to me we are making them already—or others just as bad. This king of ours—all he's good for is hornswoggling his neighbors out of land and writing Latin poetry. And digging around in libraries. It would be better if we had an illiterate one, like Theoderik."

CHAPTER V

Padway returned to Rome in the best of humor. He was, in fact, so elated that he dismounted and handed the reins of the borrowed horse to Hermann without noticing the three tough-looking parties leaning against the new fence in front of the old house on Long Street.

When he headed for the gate, the largest of the three, a black-bearded man, stepped in front of him. "Are you Martinus Paduei?"

"*Sic. Quis est?*"

"You're under arrest. Will you come along quietly?"

"*What?* Who—What for—"

"Order of the municipal prefect. Sorcery."

"But . . . but—*Hey!* You can't—"

"I said *quietly*."

The other two men had moved up on each side of Padway, and each took an arm and started to walk him along the street. When he resisted, a short bludgeon appeared in the hand of one. Padway looked around frantically. Hermann was already out of sight. Fritharik was not to be seen.

They marched him down the Argiletum to the old jail below the Record Office on the Capitoline. He was still in somewhat of a daze as the clerk demanded his name, age and address.

A small, snapping Italian who had been lounging on a bench got up. "What's this, a sorcery case involving a foreigner? Sounds like a national case to me."

"Oh, no, it isn't," said the clerk. "You national officers have authority in Rome only in mixed Roman-Gothic cases. This man says he's an American, whatever that is."

"Read your regulations! The pretorian prefect's office has jurisdiction in all capital cases involving foreigners. If you have a sorcery complaint, you turn it and the prisoner over to us."

"Don't be a fool. Think you're going to drag him clear up to Ravenna for interrogation? We've got a perfectly good torture chamber here."

"I'm only doing my duty." The state policeman grabbed Padway's arm and started to haul him toward the door. "Come along now, sorcerer. We'll show you some real up-to-date torture at Ravenna. These Roman cops don't know anything."

The clerk jumped up and grabbed Padway's other arm; so did the black-bearded man who had arrested him.

"Hey!" yelled Padway.

The state policeman shouted: "Justinius, tell the adjutant prefect that these municipal scum are trying to withhold a prisoner from us!" A man ran out the door.

Another door opened and a fat, sleepy-looking man came in. "What's this?" he squeaked.

The clerk and the municipal policeman straightened up to attention, releasing Padway. They all shouted at once at the fat man. Padway gathered that he was the municipal *commentariensius*, or police chief.

The man called Justinius came back with an elegant person who announced himself as the *corniculatis,* or adjutant prefect. This individual waved a perfumed handkerchief at the struggling group and asked a few questions, then said: "I'm sorry, my dear old *commentariensius,* but I'm afraid he's our man."

"Not yet he isn't," squeaked the chief. "You fellows can't just walk in here and grab a prisoner any time you feel like it. It would mean my job to let you have him."

The adjutant prefect yawned. "Dear, dear, you're *such* a bore. You forget that I represent the pretorian prefect, who represents the king, and if I order you to hand the prisoner over, you hand him over."

"Go ahead and order. You'll have to take him by force, and I've got more force than you have." The chief beamed and twiddled his thumbs. "Clodianus, go fetch our illustrious city governor, if he's not too busy. We'll see whether we have authority over our own jail." The clerk departed.

Eventually the clerk returned with the city governor. Count Honorius wore a tunic with the two purple stripes of a Roman senator, and walked with such a carefully measured tread that Padway wondered if his footsteps hadn't been laid out ahead of time with chalk marks. He had a square jaw and all the warmth of expression of a snapping turtle.

"What," he asked in a voice like a steel file, "is this all about? Quick, now, I'm a busy man."

The chief and the adjutant prefect gave their versions. The clerk dragged out a couple of law books; the three executive officers put their heads together and talked in low tones, turning pages rapidly and pointing to passages.

Finally the adjutant prefect gave in. He yawned elaborately. "Oh, well, it would be a dreadful bore to have to drag him up to Ravenna, anyway. Glad to have seen you, my lord count." He bowed to Honorius, nodded casually to the chief, and departed.

Honorius said: "Now that we have him, what's to be done with him? Let's see that complaint."

The clerk dug out a paper and gave it to the count.

"*Hm-m-m.* '—and furthermore, that the said Martinus Paduei did most wickedly and feloniously consort with the Evil One, who taught

him the diabolical arts of magic wherewith he has been jeopardizing the welfare of the citizens of the city of Rome—signed, Hannibal Scipio of Palermo.' Wasn't this Hannibal Scipio a former associate of yours or something?"

"Yes, my lord count," said. Padway, and explaining the circumstances of his parting with his foreman. "If it's my printing press that he's referring to, I can easily show that it's a simple mechanical device, no more magical than one of your water clocks."

"*Hm-m-m*," said Honorius, "that may or may not be true." He looked through narrowed eyes at Padway. "These new enterprises of yours have prospered pretty well, haven't they?"

"Yes and no, my lord. I have made a little money, but I've put most of it back in the business. So I haven't more cash than I need for day-to-day expenses."

"Too bad," said Honorius. "It looks as though we'd have to let the case go through."

Padway put up a bold front. "If I may say so, it would be most unfortunate for your dignity to let the case come to trial."

"So? I'm afraid, my good man, that you don't know what expert interrogators we have. You'll have admitted all sorts of things by the time they finish . . . ah . . . questioning you."

"I said I didn't have much *cash*. But I have an *idea* that might interest you."

"That's better. Lutetius, may I use your private office?"

Without waiting for an answer, Honorius marched to the office, jerking his head to Padway to follow.

Inside, he turned to Padway. "You weren't promising to bribe your governor by chance, were you?"

"Well . . . uh . . . not exactly—"

The count shot his head forward. "How much?"

Padway sighed with relief. "It's this way, my lord: I'm just a poor stranger in Rome, and naturally I have to depend on my wits for a living. With reasonably kind treatment, they can be made to pay a handsome return."

"Get to the point, young man."

"You have a law against limited-liability corporations in other than public enterprises, haven't you?"

Honorius rubbed his chin. "We did have once. I don't think the

Goths have made any regulations on that subject. Why?"

"Well, if you can get the senate to pass an amendment to the old law, I could show you how you and a few other deserving senators could benefit handsomely from the organization and operation of such a company."

Honorius stiffened. "You ought to know that the dignity of a patrician forbids him to engage in trade!"

"You wouldn't engage in it, my lord. You'd be the stockholders."

"We'd be what?"

Padway explained the operation of a stock corporation.

Honorius rubbed his chin again. "Yes, I see where something might be made of that plan. What sort of company did you have in mind?"

"A company for the transmission of information over long distances much more rapidly than a messenger can travel. The company gets its revenue from tolls on private messages. Of course, it wouldn't hurt if you could get a subsidy from the royal treasury, on the ground that the institution was valuable for national defense."

Honorius said: "I won't commit myself now; I shall have to think about the matter and sound out my friends. In the meantime, you will, of course, remain in Lutetius' custody here."

Padway grinned. "My lord count, your daughter is getting married next week, isn't she?"

"What of it?"

"You want a nice write-up of the wedding in my paper, don't you? A list of distinguished guests, a wood-cut picture of the bride, and so forth."

Honorius smiled thinly. "For a barbarian, you're not as stupid as one would expect. I'll have you released."

When Padway was out of earshot of the jail, he indulged in a long *"Whew!"*

As soon as he had put his establishment in order, he was properly prepared when the procession of five sedan chairs, bearing Honorius and four other senators, crawled up Long Street to his place. The senators seemed not only willing but eager to lay their money on the line, especially after they saw the beautiful stock certificates that Padway had printed.

One of them poked him slyly in the ribs. "My dear Martinus, you're not *really* going to put up those silly signal towers and things?"

"Well," said Padway cautiously, "that was the idea."

The senator winked. "Oh, I understand that you'll have to put up a couple to fool the middle class, so we can sell our stock at a profit. But *we* know it's all a fake, don't we?"

Padway didn't bother to argue with him. He also didn't bother to explain the true object of having Thomasus the Syrian, Ebenezer the Jew, and Vardan the Armenian each take eighteen per cent of the stock. The senators might have been interested in knowing that these three bankers had agreed ahead of time to vote as Padway instructed, thereby giving him, with fifty-four per cent of the stock, complete control of the corporation.

Padway had every intention of making his telegraph company a success, starting with a line of towers from Naples to Rome to Ravenna, and tying its operation in with that of his paper. He soon ran into an elementary difficulty: If he wanted to keep his expenses down to somewhere within sight of income, he needed telescopes, to make possible a wide spacing of the towers. Telescopes meant lenses. Where in the world was there a lens or a man who could make one?

The nearest glass industry was at Puteoli, near Naples. It would take forever to get anything done by correspondence.

Padway called in George Menandrus and hired him as editor of the paper. For several days he talked himself hoarse and Menandrus deaf on How to Be an Editor. Then, with a sinking heart, he left for Naples.

Vesuvius was not smoking. But Puteoli, on the little strip of level ground between the extinct crater of Solfatara and the sea, was. Padway and Fritharik sought out the largest and smokiest of the glass factories.

Padway asked the doorman for Andronicus, the proprietor. Andronicus was a short, brawny man covered with soot. When Padway told who he was, Andronicus cried: "Ah! Fine! Come, gentlemen, I have just the thing."

They followed him into his private inferno. The vestibule, which was also the office, was lined with shelves. The shelves were covered with glassware. Andronicus picked up a vase. "Ah! Look! Such clearness! Only twosolidi!"

Padway said: "I didn't come for a vase, my dear sir. I want some small pieces of glass, made specially—"

"Beads? Of course, gentlemen. Look." The glass manufacturer scooped up a handful of beads. "Emerald, turquoise, everything!"

"Jesus!" yelled Padway. "Will you listen?"

When Andronicus let Padway explain what he wanted, the Neapolitan said: "Of course! Fine! I've seen ornaments shaped like that. I'll rough them out tonight and have them ready day after tomorrow—"

"That won't quite do," said Padway. "These have to have an exactly spherical surface. You grind a concave against a convex with—what's your word for *emery?* The stuff you use in rough grinding? Some *naxium* to true them off . . ."

Padway and Fritharik went on to Naples and took lodgings at an inn whose lack of sanitation distressed Padway's cleanly soul.

Each morning they rode out to Puteoli to see how the lenses were cominb.

Andronicus invariably tried to sell them a ton of glass junk.

When they left for Rome, Padway had a dozen lenses, half plano-convex and half plano-concave. The glass had bubbles, and the image was somewhat distorted. But Padway's telescope, crude as it was, would make a two-to-one difference in the number of signal towers required.

CHAPTER VI

Junianus, construction manager of the Roman Telegraph Co., panted into Padway's office. He said: "Work"—stopped to get his breath, and started again—"work on the third tower on the Naples line was stopped this morning by a squad of soldiers from the Rome garrison!"

So the Goths objected? That meant seeing their higher-ups. Padway winced at the idea of getting involved any further in politics. He sighed. "I'll see Liuderis."

The commander of the Rome garrison was a big, portly Goth with the bushiest white whiskers Padway had ever seen. He said: "My

good Martinus, there is a war on. You start erecting these mysterious towers without asking our permission. Some of your backers are patricians notorious for their pro-Greek sentiments. You should consider yourself lucky to have escaped arrest."

Padway protested: "I was hoping the army would find them useful for transmitting military information."

Liuderis shrugged. "I am merely a simple soldier doing my duty. I do not understand these devices. Perhaps they will work as you say. But I could not take the responsibility for permitting them."

"Then you won't withdraw your order?"

"No. If you want permission, you will have to see the king."

Thus it came about that Padway found himself, quite against his wishes, trotting an elderly saddle horse across the Apennines toward the Adriatic. Fritharik had been delighted to get any kind of horse between his knees.

They approached Ravenna at dusk on the fourth day. The City in the Mist sat dimly astride the thirty-mile causeway that divided the Adriatic from the vast marshy lagoons to the west. A faint sunbeam lighted the gilded church domes. The church bells bonged, and the frogs in the lagoons fell silent; then resumed their croaking.

Padway found that the chief usher, like Poo-Bah, had been born sneering. "My good man," said this being, "I couldn't possibly give you an audience with our lord king for three weeks at least."

Three weeks! In that time half of Padway's assorted machines would have broken down, and his men would be running in useless circles trying to fix them. This impasse required thought. Padway straightened his aching legs and started to leave.

The Italian immediately lost some of his top-loftiness. "But," he cried in honest amazement, "didn't you bring any *money?*"

Of course, Padway thought, he should have known that the man hadn't meant what he'd said. "What's your schedule of rates?"

"Well, for twenty solidi, I could give you your audience tomorrow. For the day after, ten solidi is my usual rate; but that's Sunday, so I'm offering interviews on Monday at seven and a half. For one week in advance, two solidi. For two weeks "

Padway interrupted to offer a five-solidus bribe for a Monday interview, and finally got it at that price plus a small bottle of

brandy. The usher said. "You'll be expected to have a present for the king, too, you know."

Thiudahad Tharasmund's son, King of the Ostrogoths and Italians; Commander in Chief of the Armies of Italy, Illyria and Southern Gaul; Premier Prince of the Amal Clan; Count of Tuscany; Illustrious Patrician; *ex-officio* President of the Circus; et cetera, et cetera, was about Padway's height, thin to gauntness, and had a small gray beard. He peered at his caller with watery gray eyes nd said in a reedy voice: "Come in, come in, my good man. What's *your* business? Oh, yes, Martinus Paduei. You're the publisher chap aren't you? Eh?" He spoke upper-class Latin without a trace of accent.

Padway bowed ceremoniously. "I am, my lord king. Before we discuss the business, I have—"

"Great thing, that book-making machine of yours. I've heard of it. You must see my man Cassiodorus. I'm sure he'd like you to publish his *Gothic Hisory*. Great work. Deserves a wide circulation."

Padway waited patiently. "I have a small gift for you, my lord. A rather unusual—"

"Eh? Gift? By all means. Let's see it."

Padway took out the case and opened it.

Thiudahad piped: "Eh? What the devil is that?"

Padway explained the function of a magnifying glass. He didn't dwell on Thiudahad's notorious nearsightedness.

Thiudahad picked up a book and tried the glass on it. He squealed with delight. "Fine, my good Martinus. Shall I be able to read all I want without getting headaches?"

"I hope so, my lord. At least it should help. Now about my business here—" He went on quickly before Thiudahad could interrupt, telling him of his difficulty with Liuderis.

"Eh? I never bother my local military commanders. They know their business."

"But, my lord—" and Padway gave the king a little sales talk on the importance of the telegraph company.

"Eh? A money-making scheme, you say? If it's as good as all that, why wasn't I let in on it at the start?"

That rather jarred Padway. He said something vague about there not having been time. King Thiudahad wagged his head. "Still, that

wasn't considerate of you, Martinus. It wasn't loyal. And if people aren't loyal to their king, where are we?"

Padway resisted an impulse to strangle this exasperating little man. He beckoned Fritharik, who was standing statuesquely in the background. Fritharik produced a telescope and Padway explained *its* functions . . .

"Yes, Yes? Very interesting, I'm sure. Thank you, Martinus. I will say that you bring your king original presents."

Padway gasped; he hadn't intended giving Thiudahad his best telescope. But it was too late now. He said: "I thought that if my lord king saw fit to . . . as . . . ease matters with your excellent Liuderis, I could insure your undying fame in the world of scholarship."

"Eh? What's that? What do you know about scholarship? Oh, I forgot; you're a publisher. Something about Cassiodorus?"

Padway repressed a sigh. "No, my lord. *Not* Cassiodorus. How would you like the credit for revolutionizing men's idea about the solar system?"

"Well, maybe I'd consider it. What is this theory of yours?"

Little by little Padway wormed from Thiudahad a promise of a free hand for the telegraph company, in return for bits of information about the Copernican hypothesis, instructions for the use of the telescope to see the moons of Jupiter, and a promise to publish a treatise on astronomy in Thiudahad's name.

At the end of an hour he grinned and said, "Well, my lord, we seem to be in agreement. There's just one more thing. This telescope would be a valuable instrument of warfare. If you wanted to equip your officers with them—"

"Eh? Warfare? You'll have to see Wittigis about that. He's my head general."

"But, most excellent lord, if you'll pardon me, the war with the Imperialists is definitely on. I think it's important to get these telescopes into the hands of the army as soon as possible. We'd be prepared to supply them at a reasonable—"

"Now, Martinus," snapped the king peevishly, "don't try to tell me how to run my kingdom. I trust my commanders; don't bother myself with details. I say you'll have to see Wittigis, and that settles it."

CHAPTER VII

When Padway got back to Rome, his primary concern was to see how his paper was coming. The first issue that had been put out since his departure was all right. About the second, which had just been printed, Menandrus was mysteriously elated, hinting that he had a splendid surprise for his employer. He had. Padway glanced at a proof sheet, and his heart almost stopped. On the front page was a detailed account of the bribe which the new Pope, Silverius, had paid King Thiudahad to secure his election.

"Hell's bells!" cried Padway. "Haven't you any better sense than to print this, George?"

"Why?" asked Menandrus, crestfallen. "It's true, isn't it?"

"Of course it's true! But you don't want us all hanged or burned at the stake, do you? Even if you find that a bishop is keeping concubines, you're not to print a word of it."

Menandrus sniffled a little. "I'm sorry, excellent boss. I tried to please you; you have no idea how much trouble I went to to get the facts about that bribe. There *is* a bishop, too—not *twenty* concubines, but—"

"But we don't consider that news, for reasons of health. Thank heaven, no copies of this issue have gone out yet."

"Oh, but they have."

"*What?*"

"Why, yes, John the Bookseller took the first hundred copies out just a minute ago."

John the Bookseller got the scare of his life when Padway, still dirty from days of travel, galloped down the street after him, dove off his horse, and grabbed his arm. But he gave back the papers.

Fritharik said: "There, illustrious boss."

Padway felt much better when he learned that the first leg of the telegraph ought to be completed in a week or ten days. He poured himself a stiff drink before dinner. After his strenuous day it made his head swim a little.

When Julia was late with the food, Padway gave her a playful spank. He was a little surprised at himself.

After dinner he was sleepy. He said to hell with the accounts and went upstairs to bed, leaving Fritharik already snoring on his mat-

tress in front of the door. Padway would not have laid any long bets on Fritharik's ability to wake up when a burglar entered.

He had just started to undress when a knock startled him. He could not imagine . . .

"Fritharik?" he called.

"No. It's me."

He frowned and opened the door. The lamplight showed Julia from Apulia. She walked in with a swaying motion.

Padway blinked his eyes open. He shot out of bed. Face writhing with revulsion, he pulled his clothes on without taking time to wash. The room smelled. Rome must have blunted his sense of smell, or he'd have noticed it before.

Julia awoke as he was finishing. He threw a muttered good morning at her and tramped out.

He spent two hours in the public baths that day. The next night Julia's knock brought a harsh order to get away from his room and stay away. She began to wail. Padway snatched the door open. "One more squawk and you're fired!"

She was obedient but sulky. During the next few days he caught venomous glances from her.

The following Sunday he returned from the Ulpian Library to find a small crowd of men in front of his house. Padway looked at the house and could see nothing out of order.

He asked a man. "What's funny about my house, stranger?"

The men looked at him silently. They moved off in two and threes. They began to walk fast, sometimes glancing back.

Monday morning two of the workmen failed to report. Nerva came to Padway and, after much clearing of the throat, said: "I thought you'd like to know, lordly Martinus. I went to mass at the Church of the Angel Gabriel yesterday as usual."

"Yes?"

"Father Narcissus preached a homily against sorcery. He talked about people who hired demons from Satanas and work strange devices. He sounded as if he might be thinking of you."

Padway worried. It might be coincidence, but he was pretty sure that Julia had gone to confessional. One sermon had sent the crowd to stare at the wizard's lair. A few more like that . . .

He called Menandrus in and asked for information on Father Narcissus.

The information was discouraging. Father Narcissus was one of the most respected priests in Rome. He was upright, charitable, humane and fearless. He was in deadly earnest twenty-four hours a day. And there was no breath of scandal about him.

"George," said Padway, "didn't you once mention a bishop with concubines?"

Menandrus grinned slyly. "It's the Bishop of Bologna, sir. He's one of the Pope's cronies; spends more time at the Vatican than at his see. He has two women—at least, two that we know of. I thought it would make a good story for the paper."

"It may yet. Write me up a story, George, about the Bishop of Bologna and his loves. Make it sensational, but accurate. Set it up and pull three or four galley proofs; then put the type away in a safe place."

It took Padway a week to gain an audience with the Bishop of Bologna, who was providentially in Rome. The bishop was a gorgeously dressed person with a beautiful, bloodless face.

Padway kissed the bishop's hand and they murmured pleasant nothings. Padway talked of the Church's wonderful work and how he tried in his humble way to further it at every opportunity.

"For instance," he said, "do you know of my weekly paper, reverend sir?"

"Yes, I read it with pleasūre."

"Well, you know I have to keep a close watch on my boys, who are prone to err in their enthusiasm for news. Would you believe it, reverend sir, that I have had to suppress stories of foul libel against members of the Holy Church? The most shocking of all came in recently." He took but one of the galley proofs. "I hardly dare show it to you, sir, lest your justified wrath at this filthy product of a disordered imagination should damn me to eternal flames."

The bishop squared his thin shoulders. "Let me see it, my son. A priest sees many dreadful things in his career. It takes a strong spirit to serve the Lord in these times."

Padway handed over the sheet. The bishop read it. A sad expression came over his angelic face. "Ah, poor weak mortals! They know not that they hurt themselves far more than the object of their

calumny. If you will tell me who wrote this, I will pray for him."

"A man named Marcus," said Padway. "I discharged him immediately, of course. I want nobody who is not prepared to co-operate with the Church to the full."

The bishop cleared his throat delicately. "I appreciate your righteous efforts," he said. "If there is some favor within my power—"

Padway told him about the good Father Narcissus, who was showing such a lamentable misunderstanding of Padway's enterprises . . .

Padway went to mass next Sunday.

Father Narcissus began his sermon where he had left off a week before. Sorcery was the most damnable of crimes; they should not suffer a witch to live, etc. Padway stiffened.

But, continued the good priest with a sour glance at Padway, we should not in our holy enthusiasm confuse the practitioner of black arts and the familiar of devils with the honest artisan who by his ingenious devices ameliorates our journey through this vale of tears. After all, Adam invented the plow and Noah the ocean-going ship. And this new art of machine writing would make it possible to spread the word of God among the heathen more effectively . . .

When Padway got home, he called in Julia and told her he would not need her any more. Julia from Apulia began to weep, softly at first, then more and more violently. "What kind of man are you? I give you love. I give you everything. But no, you think I am just a little country girl you can do anythingyouwantandthenyougettired . . ." The patois came with such machine-gun rapidity that Padway could no longer follow. When she began to shriek and tear her dress, Padway ungallantly threatened to have Fritharik throw her out bodily forthwith. She quieted.

The day after she left, Padway gave his house a personal going-over to see whether anything had been stolen or broken.

Padway told Thomasus: "We ought to get the first message from Naples over the telegraph any time now."

Thomasus rubbed his hands together. "You are a wonder, Martinus. Only I'm worried that you'll overreach yourself. The messengers of the Italian civil service are complaining that this invention will destroy their livelihood. Unfair competition, they say."

Padway shrugged. "We'll see. Maybe there'll be some war news."

Thomasus frowned. "That's another thing that's worrying me. Thiudahad hasn't done a thing about the defense of Italy. I'd hate to see the war carried as far north as Rome."

"I'll make you a bet," said Padway. "The king's son-in-law, Evermuth the Vandal, will desert to the Imperialists. One solidus."

"Done!" Almost at that moment Junianus, who had been put in charge of operations, came in with a paper. It was the first message, and it carried the news that Belisarius had landed at Reggio; that Evermuth had gone over to him; that the Imperialists were marching on Naples.

Padway grinned at the banker, whose jaw was sagging. "Sorry, old man, but I need that solidus. I'm saving up for a horse."

"Do You hear that, God? Martinus, the next time I lay a bet with a magician, you can have me declared incompetent and a guardian appointed."

Two days later a messenger came in and told Padway that the king was in Rome, staying at the Palace of Tiberius, and that Padway's presence was desired.

"My good Martinus," said Thiudahad, "I must ask you to discontinue the operation of your telegraph. At once."

"What? Why, my lord king?"

"You know what happened? Ah? That thing of yours spread the news of my son-in-law's good fort—his treachery all over Rome a few hours after it happened. Bad for morale. Encourages the pro-Greek element, and brings criticism on me. *Me.* So you'll please not operate it any more, at least during the war."

"But, my lord, I thought that your army would find it useful for—"

"Not another word about it, Martinus. I forbid it. Now, let me see. Dear me, there was something else I wanted to see you about. Oh, yes, my man Cassiodorus would like to meet you. You'll stay for lunch, won't you? Great scholar, Cassiodorus."

So Padway presently found himself bowing to the pretorian prefect, an elderly, rather saintly Italian. They were immediately deep in a discussion of historiography, literature, and the hazards of the publishing business.

When Padway left, hours later, he had at least made an effort to

bring the conversation around to measures for prosecuting the war. It had been useless, but his conscience was salved.

Padway was surprised at the effect of the news of his acquaintance with the king and the prefect. Well-born Romans called on him, and he was even asked to a couple of very dull dinners that began at four P.M. and lasted most of the night.

Even Cornelius Anicius looked him up and issued the long-coveted invitation to his house.

Padway swallowed his pride and accepted. He thought it foolish to judge Anicius by his own standards. And he wanted another look at the pretty brunette.

When the time came, he got up from his desk, washed his hands, and told Fritharik to come along.

Padway was shown into a big room whose ornamentation reminded him of the late Victorian gewgaw culture.

The servant sneaked through the door and whispered. Anicius popped out with a book under his arm. He cried: "My dear Martinus! I was rehearsing a speech I am to give tomorrow." He tapped the book under his arm and smiled guiltily. "It will not be a strictly original speech; but you won't betray me, will you?"

"Of course not."

"I shall be as nervous tomorrow as Cadmus when the dragon's teeth began to sprout. And now I'll leave you to Dorothea's mercy while I finish this. You will not take offense, I hope? Splendid! Oh, daughter!"

Dorothea appeared and exchanged courtesies. She took Padway out in the garden while Anicius went back to his plagiarism of Sidonius.

Dorothea said: "You should hear father orate. He takes you back to the time when Rome really was the mistress of the world. If restoring the power of Rome could be done by fine talk, father and his friends would have restored it long ago."

It was hot in the garden, with the heat of an Italian June. Bees buzzed.

Padway said: "What kind of flower do you call that?"

She told him. He was hot. And he was tired of strain and responsibility and ruthless effort. He wanted to be young and foolish for a change.

He asked her more questions about flowers—trivial questions about unimportant matters.

She answered prettily, bending over the flowers to remove a bug now and then. She was hot too. There were little beads of sweat on her upper lip. Her thin dress stuck to her in places. Padway admired the places. She was standing close to him, talking with grave good humor about flowers and about the bugs and blights that beset them. To kiss her, all he had to do was reach and lean forward a bit. He could hear his blood in his ears. The way she smiled up at him might almost be considered an invitation.

But Padway made no move. He didn't know how she'd take it, and shouldn't presume on the strength of a mere friendly smile; if he resented it, there might be repercussions of incalculable scope; if he made love to her, what would she think he was after?

It made him a little sad that he would never be one of those impetuous fellows—usually described as tall and handsome—who take one look at a girl, know her to be their destined mate, and sweep her into their arms. He let Dorothea do most of the talking as they wandered back into the house to dinner with Cornelius Anicius and Anicius' oratory.

They sat down—or rather stretched themselves out on the couches, as Anicius insisted on eating in the good old Roman style, to Padway's acute discomfort. Anicius had a look in his eye that Padway found familiar: the look was that of a man who is writing or is about to write a book.

Anicius exclaimed: "Ah, the degenerate times we live in, excellent Martinus! The lyre of Orpheus sounds but faintly; Calliope veils her face; blithe Thalia is mute. Yet a few of us strive to hold high the torch of poetry while swimming the Hellespont of barbarism and hoeing the garden of culture."

"Quite a feat," said Padway, squirming in a vain effort to find a comfortable position.

"Yes, we persist despite Herculean discouragements. For instance, you will not consider me forward in submitting to your publisher's eagle-bright scrutiny a little book of verses." He produced a sheaf of papyrus. "Some of them are not really bad, though I, their unworthy author, say so."

"I should be very much interested. As for publication, however,

I should warn you that I'm contracted for three books by your excellent colleagues already."

"Oh," said Anicius with a drooping inflection.

"The Illustrious Trajanus Herodius, the Distinguished John Leontius, and the Respectable Felix Avitus. All epic poems. Because of market conditions, these gentlemen have undertaken the financial responsibility of publication."

"Meaning—ah?"

"Meaning that they pay cash in advance and get the whole price of their books when sold, subject to bookseller's discounts. Of course, distinguished sir, if the book is really good, the author doesn't have to worry about getting back his cost of publication."

"Yes, yes, excellent Martinus, I see. What chances do you think my little creation would have?"

"I'd have to see it first."

"So you would. I'll read some of it now, to give you the idea." Anicius sat up. He held the papyrus in one hand and made noble gestures with the other:

"Mars with his thunderous trumpet his lord acclaims,
The youthful Jupiter, new to his throne ascended,
Above the stars by all-wise Nature placed.
The lesser deities their sire worship,
To ancient sovereignty with pomp succeeding—"

"Father," interrupted Dorothea, "I think you ought to write some good Christian sentiment some time, instead of all that pagan superstition."

Anicius sighed. "If you ever have a daughter, Martinus, marry her off early, before she develops the critical faculty."

In August, Naples fell to General Belisarius. Padway heard the news with a sick feeling. There was so much that he could do for them if they'd only let him alone. And it would take such a little accident to snuff him out—one of the normal accidents of warfare, like that which happened to Archimedes.

Fritharik announced that a party of Goths wanted to look Padway's place over. He added in his sepulchral voice: "Thiudegiskel's

with them. You know, the king's son. Watch out for him, excellent boss. He makes trouble."

There were six of them, all young, and they tramped into the house wearing swords, which was not good manners by the standards of the times. Thiudegiskel was a handsome, blond young man who had inherited his father's high-pitched voice.

He stared at Padway, like something in a zoo, and said: "I've wanted to see your place ever since I heard you and the old man were mumbling over manuscripts together. I'm a curious chap, you know, active-minded. What the devil are all these silly machines for?"

Padway did some explaining, while the prince's companions made remarks about his personal appearance in Gothic, under the mistaken impression that he couldn't understand them.

"Ah, yes," said Thiudegiskel, interrupting one of the explanations. "I think that's all I'm interested in here. Now, let's see that bookmaking machine."

Padway showed him the presses.

"Oh, yes, I understand. Really a simple thing, isn't it? I could have invented it myself. All very well for those who like it. Though I can read and write and all that. But I never cared for it. Dull business, not suited to a healthy man like me."

"No doubt, no doubt, my lord," said Padway. He hoped that the red rage he was feeling didn't show in his face.

"Would you like to see anything more?"

"Oh, I don't know—Say, what are all those packing cases for?"

"Some stuff just arrived for our machines, my lord, and we haven't gotten around to burning the cases," Padway lied.

Thiudegiskel grinned good-naturedly. "Trying to fool me, huh? I know what you're up to. You're going to sneak your stuff out of Rome before Belisarius gets here, aren't you? Well, can't say I blame you." He examined a new brass telescope on a workbench. "This is an interesting little device. I'll take it along, if you don't mind."

That was too much even for Padway's monumental prudence. "No, my lord, I'm sorry, but I need that in my business."

Thiudegiskel's eyes were round with astonishment. "Huh? You mean I can't have it?"

"That, my lord, is it."

"Well . . . uh . . . uh . . . if you're going to take that attitude,

I'll pay for it."

"It isn't for sale."

Thiudegiskel's neck turned slowly pink with embarrassment and anger. His five friends moved up behind him, their left hands resting on their sword hilts.

The one called Willimer said in a low tone: "I *think,* gentlemen, that our king's son had been insulted."

Thiudegiskel had laid the telescope on the bench. He reached out for it; Padway snatched it up and smacked the end of the tube meaningfully against his left palm.

The uncomfortable silence was broken by the shuffle of feet behind Padway; he saw the Goths' eyes shift from him. He glanced around. In the doorway was Fritharik, with his sword belt hitched around so the scabbard was in front, and Nerva, holding a three-foot length of bronze bar-stock. Behind them came the other workmen with an assortment of blunt instruments.

"It seems," said Thiudegiskel, "that these people have no manners whatever. We should give them a lesson. But I promised my old man to lay off fighting. That's one thing about me; I always keep my promises. Come along, boys." They went.

"*Whew!*" said Padway. "You boys saved my bacon. Thanks."

"Oh, it was nothing," said George Menandrus airily. "I'm rather sorry they didn't stay to fight it out. I'd have enjoyed smacking their thick skulls."

"You? *Honh!*" snorted Fritharik. "Boss, the first thing I saw when I started to round the men up was this fellow sneaking out the back door. You know I changed his mind? I said I'd hang him with a rope made of my own guts if he didn't stick! And the others, I threatened to cut their heads off and stick them on the fence palings in front of the house." He contemplated infinite calamities for a few seconds, then added: "But it won't do any good, excellent Martinus. Those fellows will have it in for us, and they're pretty influential, naturally."

Padway struggled mightily to get the movable parts of his equipment packed for shipment to Florence. As far as he could remember his Procopius, Florence had not been besieged or sacked in Justinian's Gothic War, at least in the early part.

But the job was not half done when eight soldiers from the garri-

son descended on him and told him he was under arrest. He was getting rather used to arrest by now, so he calmly gave his foremen and editor orders about getting the equipment moved and set up, and about seeing Thomasus and trying to get in touch with him. Then he went along. On the way he offered to stand the Goths drinks. They accepted quickly. In the wineshop he got the commander aside to suggest a little bribe to let him go. The Goth seemed to accept, and pocketed a solidus. Then when Padway, his mind full of plans for shaving his beard, getting a horse, and galloping off to Florence, broached the subject of his release, the Goth looked at him with an air of pained surprise.

"Why, most distinguished Martinus, I couldn't think of letting you go! Our commander-in-chief, the noble Liuderis, is a man of stern and rigid principles. If my men talked, he'd hear about it, and he'd break me sure. Of couse I appreciate your little *gift*, and I'll try to put in a good word for you."

CHAPTER VIII

Liuderis blew out his snowy whiskers and explained: "I am sorry you deceived me, Martinus. I never thought a true Arian would stoop to . . . ah . . . conniving with these pro-Greek Italians to let a swarm of Orthodox fanatics into Italy."

"Who says so?" asked Padway, more annoyed than apprehensive.

"No less a person than the . . . ah . . . noble Thiudegiskel. He told how when he visited your house, you not only insulted and reviled him, but boasted of your connections with the Imperialists. His companions corroborated him. They said you had inside information about a plan for betraying Rome, and that you were planning to move your effects elsewhere. When my men arrested you, they found that you were in fact about to move."

"My dear sir!" said Padway in exasperation. "Don't you think I have *any* brains? If I were in on some plot of some sort, do you think I would go around telling the world about it?"

Liuderis shrugged. "I would not know. I am only doing my duty, which is to hold you for questioning about this secret plan. Take

him away, Sigifrith."

Padway hid a shudder at the word "questioning." If this honest blockhead got set on an idea, he'd have a swell chance of talking him out of it.

The Goths had set up a prison camp at the north end of the city, between the Flaminian Way and the Tiber. Two sides of the camp were formed by a hastily erected fence, and the remaining two by the Wall of Aurelian. Padway found that two Roman patricians had preceded him in custody; both said they had been arrested on suspicion of complicity in an Imperialist plot. Several more Romans arrived within a few hours.

For three days, Padway rusticated. He walked from one end of the camp to the other, and back, and forward, and back. He talked a little with his fellow prisoners, but in a moody and abstracted manner.

He'd been a fool in supposing that he could carry out his plans with as little difficulty as in Chicago. This was a harsh, convulsive world; you had to take it into account, or you'd get caught in the gears sooner or later. He'd kept out of public affairs as much as possible, and here was in a horrifying predicament as a result of a petty squabble over a brass telescope.

The fourth day failed to settle Padway's gnawing anxiety about his interrogation. The guards seemed excited about something. Padway tried to question them, but they rebuffed him. Listening to their muttering talk, he caught the word *folknote*. That meant that the great meeting was about to be held near Terracina, at which the Goths would consider what to do about the loss of Naples.

Thomasus the Syrian arrived. He explained: "Nerva tried to get in to see you, but he couldn't afford a high enough bribe. How do they treat you?"

"Not badly. What worries me is that Liuderis thinks I know all about some alleged conspiracy to betray Rome, and he may use drastic methods to try to get information out of me."

"Oh, that. There's a conspiracy afoot, all right. But I think you'll be safe for a few days anyway. Liuderis has gone off to a convention, and the Goths' affairs are all in confusion." He went on to report on the state of Padway's business. "We got the last case off this morning. Ebenezer is going up to Florence in a couple of weeks.

He'll look in and see that your foremen haven't run off with all your property."

"Any war news?"

"None, except that Naples suffered pretty badly. Belisarius' Huns got out of hand when the town was captured. But I suppose you know that. You can't tell me that you haven't some magical knowledge of the future."

When Thomasus was ready to go, he asked Padway: "Is there anything I can bring you? I don't know what the guards will allow, but if there's something—"

Padway thought. "Yes," he said. "I'd like some painting equipment."

"Painting? You mean you're going to whitewash the Wall of Aurelian?"

"No; stuff for painting pictures. *You* know." Padway made motions.

"Oh, *that* kind of painting. Sure. It'll pass the time."

Padway wanted to get on top of the wall, to give the camp a proper looking-over for ways of escape. So when Thomasus brought his painting supplies, he applied to the commander of the guards, a surly fellow named Hrotheigs, for permission. Hrotheigs took one look and spoke one word: "*Ni!*"

Padway masked his annoyance and retired to ponder on How to Win Friends. He spent the better part of the day experimenting with his equipment, which was a bit puzzling to one unaccustomed to it.

Padway was not a professional artist by any means, but an archeologist has to know something about drawing and painting in the exercise of his profession. So the next day Padway felt confident enough to ask Hrotheigs if he would like his portrait painted.

The Goth for the first time looked almost pleased. "*Could* you make a picture of me? I mean one for me to keep?"

"Try to, excellent captain. I don't know how good it'll be."

So Padway painted a picture. As far as he could see, it looked as much like any black-bearded ruffian as it did like Hrotheigs. But the Goth was delighted, asserting that it was his spit and image. The second time he made no objections to Padway's climbing the wall to paint landscapes from the top, merely detailing a guard to keep close to him.

He was digesting this information when his attention was attracted to the camp. A couple of guards were bringing in a prisoner in rich Gothic clothes who was not co-operating. Padway recognized Thiudegiskel, the king's precious son. This was too interesting. Padway went down the ladder.

"*Hails,*" he said. "Hello."

Thiudegiskel was squatting disconsolately by himself. He was somewhat disheveled and his face had been badly bruised. He looked up. "Oh, it's you," he said. Most of the arrogance seemed to have been let out of him.

"I didn't expect to run into you here," said Padway. "What are you in for?"

"Hadn't you heard? I'm not the king's son any more. Or rather my old man isn't king. The convention deposed him and elected that fathead Wittigis. So Fathead has me locked up so I can't make trouble."

"*Tsk, tsk.* Too bad."

Thiudegiskel grinned painfully. "Don't try to tell me *you're* sorry for me. But say, maybe you can tell me what sort of treatment to expect, and whom to bribe, and so on."

Padway gave the young man a few pointers on getting on with the guards, then asked: "Where's Thiudahad now?"

"The last I'd heard he'd gone up to Tivoli to get away from the heat. But he was supposed to come back down here this week. Some piece of literary research he's working on."

Between what Padway remembered of the history of the time and the information he had recently picked up, he had a good picture of the courses of events. Thiudahad had been kicked out. The new king, Wittigis, would put up a loyal and determined resistance. The result would be worse than no resistance at all as far as Italy was concerned. He could not beat the Imperialists, having no brains to speak of. He would begin his campaign with the fatal mistake of marching off to Ravenna, leaving Rome with only its normal garrison.

Neither could the Imperialists beat him with their slender forces except by years of destructive campaigning. Anything, from Padway's point of view, was preferable to a long war. If the Imperialists did

win, their conquest would prove ephemeral.

If the Goths were lazy and ignorant, the Greeks were rapacious and venal. Yet these two were the best rulers available. The sixth-century Italian was too hopelessly unmilitary to stand on his own two feet.

On the whole, the Gothic regime had not had an ill effect. The Goths enforced tolerance on a people whose idea of religious liberty was freedom to hang, drown or burn all members of sects other than their own. And the Goths looked on the peninsula as a pleasant home to be protected and preserved.

Suppose, then, he decided to work for a quick victory by the Goths instead of a quick victory for the Imperialists. How could the Gothic regime be succored? It would do no good for him to try to persuade the Goths to get rid of Wittigis. If the Gothic king could be induced to take Padway's advice, something might be done. But old Thiudahad, worthless as he was by himself, *might* be managed.

A plan began to form in Padway's mind. He wished he'd told Thomasus to hurry back sooner. To keep darkness from falling—

When Thomasus did appear, Padway told him: "I want a couple of pounds of sulphur, mixed with olive oil to form a paste, and some candles. And forty feet of light rope, strong enough to support a man."

"But how on earth am I going to smuggle those things in? The guards watch pretty closely."

"Bring the sulphur paste in a container at the bottom of a food basket. If they open it, say it's something my physician ordered. And for the rope, go to my tailor and get a green cloak like mine. Have him fasten the rope inside around the edges, lightly, so it can be ripped out. Then, when you come in, lay your cloak alongside mine, and pick mine up when you go."

"Martinus, that's a crazy plan. I'll get caught sure, and what will become of my family? What time would you want me to come around with the rope and things?"

Padway sat on the Wall of Aurelian in the bright morning sunshine. He affected to be much interested in the Tomb of Hadrian down river on the other side. The guard who was detailed to him, one Aiulf, looked over his shoulder.

Padway's attention was actually on things other than the Tomb. He was covertly watching all the guards and his little pile of belongings. All the prisoners did that, for obvious reasons. But Padway was wondering when the candle concealed in the food basket would burn down to the sulphur paste. He had apparently had a lot of trouble that morning getting his brazier going; actually he had been setting up his little infernal machine.

Aiulf grew tired of watching and retired a few steps. He sat down on his little stool, took up his flutelike instrument and started to play faint moaning notes.

Padway worked and worked, and still his contraption showed no signs of life. The candle must have gone out; it would surely have burned down to the sulphur by now. It would soon be time for lunch. If they called him down off the wall, it would arouse suspicion for him to say he wasn't hungry. Perhaps.

Below, in the camp, a prisoner coughed; then another. Then they were all coughing. Fragments of talk floated up: "That's burning sulphur, by all the saints—" "Maybe the Devil is paying us a call—" People moved around; the coughing increased; the guards trailed into the camp. Somebody located the source of the fumes and kicked Padway's pile. Instantly a square yard was covered with yellow mush over which little blue flames danced. There were strangled shouts. A thin wisp of blue smoke crawled up through the still air. The guards on the wall, including Aiulf, hurried to the ladder and down.

Padway had planned his course carefully. Over his brazier were two little pots of molten wax, both already pigmented. He plunged his hands into the scalding stuff and smeared his face and beard with dark green wax. It hardened almost instantly. With his fingers, he smeared three large circles of yellow wax from the other pot over the green.

Then, as if were just strolling, he walked up to the angle of the wall, squatted down out of sight of those in the camp, ripped the rope out of the lining of his cloak, and slipped a bight over a projection at the corner of the wall. Padway lowered himself down the north face of the wall, hand over hand.

He trotted down the slope to the pond, carrying the rope. He walked carefully out to where it was a couple of feet deep, sat down

in the dark water, like a man getting into an over-hot tub bath, and stretched out on his back among the pond lilies until only his nose and eyes were above water. He moved the water plants around until they hid him pretty thoroughly. For the rest, he had to rely on the green of his cloak and his bizarre facial camouflage for concealment.

There were shouts, the blowing of whistles, the pounding of large Gothic feet on the top of the wall. The guards waved to the soldiers across the river. Padway didn't dare turn his head far enough to see, but he could imagine a rowboat being put out.

Padway lay still while guards searched around the base of the wall and poked swords into the bushes. He lay still, his eyes almost closed, while a couple of Goths walked around the pond and stared hard at it and him, hardly thirty feed from them. He lay still while a Goth on a horse rode splashing through the pond, actually passing within fifteen feet of him. He lay still through the whole long afternoon, until the sounds finally faded away completely.

Nevitta Gummund's son was justifiably startled when a man rose from the shadows of the bushes that lined the driveway to his house and called him by name. He had just ridden up to the farm. Hermann, in tow as usual, had his sword halfway out before Martin Padway identified himself.

He explained: "I got here a couple of hours ago and wanted to borrow a horse. Your people said you were away at the convention, but that you'd be back sometime tonight. So I've been waiting." He went on to tell briefly of his imprisonment and escape.

The Goth bellowed. "You mean to say, ha! ha! that you lay in the pond all day, right under the noses of the guards, with your face painted up like a damned flower? Ha! ha! That's the best thing I ever heard!"

Later, he said more seriously: "I'd like to trust you, Martinus. By all accounts, you're a pretty reliable young man, in spite of your funny foreign ways. But how do I *know* that Liuderis wasn't right? People say you can foresee the future and some of those machines of yours do smell of magic."

"I'll tell you," saaid Padway thoughtfully. "I can see a little bit of the future. That is, I can sometimes see what will happen *if* people are allowed to do what they intend to. If I use my knowledge to

intervene, that changes the future, so my vision isn't true any more. In this case, I know that Wittigis will lose the war And he'll lose in the worst possible way—at the end of years of fighting which will completely devastate Italy. The last thing I want is to see the country ruined; it would spoil a lot of plans I have. So I propose to intervene and change the natural course of events. The results may be better; they could hardly be worse."

Nevitta frowned. "You mean you're going to try to defeat us Goths quickly. I don't think I could agree to such—"

"No. I propose to win your war for you."

CHAPTER IX

If Padway wasn't mistaken, and if Procopius' history had not lied, Thiudahad ought to pass along the Flaminian Way in his panicky flight to Ravenna. All the way, Padway had asked people whether the ex-king had passed. All said no. He and Hermann made themselves easy by the side of the road and listened to their horses cropping grass. Padway looked at his companion with a bilious eye. Hermann had taken much too much beer aboard at Ocriculum.

To Padway's instructions about taking turns at watching the road, he merely grinned idiotically and said, "*Ja, ja!*" He had finally gone to sleep in the middle of a sentence, and no amount of shaking would arouse him.

Padway walked up and down in the shade, listening to Hermann's snores and trying to think.

Could Padway's influence have changed Thiudahad's plans? Padway saw his influence as a set of ripples spreading over a pool. By the mere fact of having known him, the lives of people like Thomasus and Fritharik had already been changed radically from what they would have been if he'd never appeared in Rome.

But Thiudahad had only seen him twice and nothing very drastic had happened either time. Thiudahad's course in time and space might have been altered, but only very slightly. The other higher-up Goths, such as King Wittigis, ought not to have been affected at all.

That new bit of dust down the road was probably another damned

cow or flock of sheep. No, it was a man on a horse. He was in a hurry, whoever he was. Padway's ears caught the blowing of a hard-ridden mount; then he recognized Thiudahad.

"Hermann!" he yelled.

"*Akhkhkhkhkhkhg,*" snored Hermann.

Padway gave up; the ex-king would be up to them in an instant. He swung aboard his horse and trotted out into the road with his arm up. "*Hai,* Thiudahad! My lord!"

Thiudahad kicked his horse and hauled on the reins at the same time, apparently undecided whether to stop, try to run past Padway, or turn around the way he had come. The exasperated animal thereupon put his head down and bucked.

"Who . . . who . . . what—Oh, it's the publisher. Why are you stopping me? I've got to get to Ravenna."

"Calm yourself. You'd never reach Ravenna alive."

"What do you mean? Are you out to murder me, too?"

"Not at all. But, as you may have heard, I have some small skill at reading the future."

"Yes, I've heard. What's . . . what's my future? Don't tell me I'm going to be killed! *Please* don't tell me that, excellent Martinus. If they'll just let me live, I won't bother anybody again, ever." The little gray-bearded man fairly gibbered with fright.

"Do you remember when, for a consideration. you swindled a noble Goth out of a beautiful heiress who had been promised to him in marriage?"

"Oh, dear me. That would be Optaris Winithar's son. wouldn't it? Only don't say "swindled," excellent Martinus. I merely . . . ah . . . exerted my influence on the side of the better man But what of it?"

"Wittigis gave Optaris a commission to hunt you down and kill you. He's following you now, riding day and night. If you continue toward Ravenna, this Optaris will catch up with you before you get there, pull you off your horse, and cut your throat—like this, *khh!*"

Thiudahad covered his face with his hands. "What'll I do, what'll I do? If I could get to Ravenna, I have friends there—"

"That's what *you* think. I know better."

"But is Optaris fated to kill me no matter what I do? Can't we hide?"

"Perhaps. My prophecy is good only if you try to carry out your

original plan."

"Well, we'll hide, then."

"All right, just as soon as I get this fellow awake." Padway indicated Hermann.

"Why not just leave him?"

"He works for a friend of mine. He was supposed to take care of me, but it's turned out the other way around." They dismounted, and Padway resumed his efforts to arouse Hermann.

Thiudahad sat down on the grass and moaned: "Such ingratitude! And I was such a good king—"

"Sure," said Padway acidily, "except for breaking your oath to Amalaswentha not to interfere in public affairs, and then having her murdered—"

"But you don't understand, excellent Martinus. She had our noblest patriot, Count Tulum, murdered, along with those other two friends of her son Athalarik—"

"—and offering to sell Italy to Justinian in return for an estate near Constantinople and an annuity—"

"*What?* How did you know—I mean it's a lie!"

"I know lots of things. To continue: neglecting the defense of Italy; failing to relieve Naples—"

"Oh, dear me. You don't understand, I tell you. I hate all this military business. I admit I'm no soldier; I'm a scholar. So I leave it to my generals. That's only sensible, isn't it?"

"As events have proved—no. If you obey orders, I may even be able to get you back your kingship. But it'll be purely nominal this time, understand." Padway didn't miss the crafty gleam in Thiudahad's eyes. Then the eyes shifted past Padway.

"Here he comes! It's the murderer, Optaris!" he squealed.

Padway spun around. Sure enough, a burly Goth was smoking up the road toward them.

He had no weapon but a knife designed for cutting steaks rather than human throats. Thiudahad had no sword, either. To Padway, swords seemed silly weapons, always catching you between the knees.

Thiudahad stood rooted to the spot, trembling violently and making little meowing sounds of terror. He wet his dry lips and squealed one word over and over: "*Armaio!* Mercy!" Optaris grinned through his beard and swung his right arm up.

At the last instant, Padway dived at the ex-king and tackled him, rolling him out of the way of Optaris' horse. He scrambled up as Optaris reined in furiously, the animal's hoofs kicking dust forward as they braked. Thiudahad got up, too, and bolted for the shelter of the trees. With a yell of rage, Optaris jumped to the ground and took after him. Meantime, Padway tore Hermann's sword out of the scabbard and sprinted to cut off Optaris. Optaris saw him coming and started for him, evidently preferring to settle with Padway first.

Padway had only the crudest theoretical knowledge of fencing and no practical experience whatever. The heavy Gothic broadsword was unfamiliar and uncomfortable in his sweaty hand. He could see the whites of Optaris' eyes as the Goth trotted up to him, took his measure, shifted his weight, and whipped his sword arm up for a back-hand slash.

Padway's parry was more instinctive than designed. The blades met with a great clang, and Padway's borrowed sword went sailing away into the woods. Optaris struck again, but met only air and swung himself halfway around. If Padway was an incompetent fencer, there was nothing the matter with his legs. He sprinted after his sword, found it, and kept right on running. He'd been a minor quarter-mile star in college; if he could run the legs off Optaris, maybe the odds would be nearer even when they finally—*umph!* He tripped over a root and sprawled on his face.

Somehow he rolled over and got to his feet before Optaris came up to him. And, somehow, he got himself between Optaris and a pair of big oaks that grew too close together to be squeezed between. So there was nothing for him to do but stand and take it. As the Goth swung his sword over his head, Padway, in a last despairing gesture, thrust as far as he could at Optaris' exposed chest, more with the idea of keeping the man off than of hurting him.

Now, Optaris was an able fighter. But the sword-play of his age was entirely with the edge. Nobody had ever worked a simple stop thrust on him. So it was no fault of his that he spitted himself neatly on the outthrust blade. His own slash faltered and ended against one of the oaks. The Goth gasped and his thick legs slowly sagged. He fell, pulling the sword out of his body.

When Thiudahad and Hermann came up, they found Padway vomiting quietly against a tree trunk. He barely heard their con-

gratulations. He was reacting to his first homicide with a combination of humane revulsion and buck fever.

He said to Thiudahad: "We'd better disguise you. If you're recognized, Wittigis will send another of your friends around to call. Better take that beard off first. And your clothes are entirely too fancy. Hermann, could I trust you to go into Narnia and buy an Italian peasant's outfit?"

"*Ja, ja*, you give me *silubr*. I go."

"What?" squeaked Thiudahad. "I will not get myself up in such an absurd costume! A prince of the Amalings has his dignity—"

CHAPTER X

Liuderis Oskar's son, commander of the garrison of the city of Rome, looked out of his office window gloomily at the gray September skies. The world had been turning upside down too often for this simple, loyal soul. First Thiudahad is deposed and Wittigis elected king. Then Wittigis convinces himself and the other Gothic leaders that the way to deal with the redoubtable Belisarius is to run off to Ravenna, leaving an inadequate garrison in Rome. And now it transpires that the citizens are becoming dissatisfied; worse, that his troops are afraid to try to hold the city against the Greeks; worse yet, that Pope Silverius, blandly violating his oaths to Wittigis on the ground that the king is a heretic, has been corresponding with Belisarius with the object of arranging a bloodless surrender of the city.

But all these shocks were mild when the two callers announced by his orderly turned out to be Martin Padway and ex-King Thiudahad. "You!" he said. "You!"

"Yes, us," said Padway mildly.

"But . . . but we have another king! You two are supposed to have prices on your heads or something."

"The Royal Council was a little hasty in its action, as we hope to show them in time. We'll explain—"

"But where have you been? And how did you escape from my camp? And what are you doing here?"

"One thing at a time, please, excellent Liuderis. First, we've been up at Florence collecting a few supplies for the campaign. Second—"

"What campaign?"

"—second, I have ways of getting out of camps. Third, we're here to lead your troops against the Greeks and destroy them."

"You are mad, both of you! I shall have you locked up until—"

"The king will tell you how I foresaw Optaris' unfortunate attempt on his life and how I used my knowledge to thwart Optaris' plans. If you insist, I can produce more evidence. For instance, I can tell you that you'll get no help from Ravenna. That Belisarius will march up the Latin Way in November. That the Pope will persuade your garrison to march away before they arrive. And that *you* will remain at your post and be captured and sent to Constantinople."

Liuderis gaped. "Are you in league with Satanas? I have not told a soul of my determination to stay if my garrison leaves, and yet you know of it."

"Moreover, Wittigis will eventually lose his war, though only after years of destructive fighting. All these things will happen unless you change your plans."

It took an hour of talk to wear Liuderis down to the point where he asked: "Well, what plans for operations against the Greeks did you have in mind?"

Padway replied: "We know they'll come by the Latin Way, so there's no point in leaving Terracina garrisoned. And we know when they'll come. Counting the Terracina garrison, about how many men could you collect by the end of next month?"

Liuderis blew out his whiskers and thought. "If I called in the men from Formia—six thousand, perhaps seven. About half and half archers and lancers. That is, assuming that King Wittigis did not hear of it and interfere. But news travels slowly."

"If I could show you how you'd have a pretty good chance against the Greeks, would you lead them out?"

"I do not know. I should have to think. Perhaps. If as you say our king—excuse me, noble Thiudahad, I mean the *other* king—is bound to be defeated, it might be worth taking a chance on. What would you do?"

"Belisarius has about ten thousand men," replied Padway. "He'll leave two thousand to garrison Naples and other southern towns.

He'll still outnumber us a little. I notice that your brave Wittigis ran off when he had twenty thousand available."

Liuderis shrugged and looked embarrassed. "It is true, that was not a wise move. But he expects many thousands more from Gaul and Dalmatia."

"Have your men had any practice at night attacks?" asked Padway.

"You mean to assault the enemy at *night?* A night attack does not sound very practical to me. How would you keep control of your men?"

"That's just the point. Nobody ever heard of the Goths making a night attack, so it ought to have some chance of success. But it'll require special training. First, you'll have to throw out patrols on the roads leading north, to turn back people who might carry the news to Ravenna. And I need a couple of good catapult engineers. I don't want to depend entirely on the books in the libraries for my artillery. If none of your troops knows anything about catapults, we ought to be able to dredge up a Roman or two who does."

Padway lay on a hilltop near Fregellae and watched the Imperialists through a telescope. He was surprised that Belisarius, as the foremost soldier in his age, hadn't thrown scouts out farther, but then this was 536. His advance party consisted of a few hundred mounted Huns and Moors, who galloped about, pushing up side roads a few hundred yards and racing back. Then came two thousand of the famous *cataphracti* or cuirassiers, trotting in orderly formation. The low, cold sun glittered on the scales of their armor.

These were the best and certainly the most versatile soldiers in the world, and everybody was afraid of them. Padway, watching their cloaks and scarves flutter behind them, didn't feel too confident himself. Then came three thousand Isaurian archers marching afoot, and finally two thousand more cuirassiers.

Liuderis, at Padway's elbow, said: "That is some sort of signal. *Ja*, I believe they are going to camp there. How did you know they would pick that spot, Martinus?"

"Simple. You remember that little device I had on the wheel of that wagon? That measures distance. I measured the distances along the road. Knowing their normal day's march and the point they

started from, the rest was easy."

"*Tsk, tsk,* wonderful. How do you think of all those things?" Liuderis' big, trustful eyes reminded Padway of those of a St. Bernard. "Shall I have the engineers set up Brunhilde now?"

"Not yet. When the sun sets, we'll measure the distance to the camp."

"How will you do that without being seen?"

"I'll show you when the time comes. Meanwhile, make sure that the boys keep quiet and out of sight."

Liuderis frowned. "They will not like having to eat a cold supper. If we do not watch them, somebody will surely start a fire."

The Byzantines set up their camp with orderly promptitude. Those, Padway thought, were real soldiers. It would be a long time before the Goths attained such a smooth perfection of movement. The Goths were still obsessed with childish, slam-bang ideas of warfare.

It was getting too dark for his telescope to be useful. He could make out the general's standard in front of a big tent. Perhaps Belisarius was one of those little figures around it. If he had a machine-gun—but he didn't have, and never would. You needed machines to to make those machines, and so on. If he ever got a workable muzzle-loading musket, he'd be doing well.

He superintended the driving of a stake into the ground and paced off the base of a triangle. With a little geometry, he figured the quarter-mile distance that was Brunhilde's range, and ordered the big catapult set up. The thing required eleven wagon-loads of lumber, even though it was not of record size. Padway hovered around his engineers nervously, hissing reprimands when somebody dropped a piece of wood.

Snatches of song came from the Byzantine camp. Apparently Padway's scheme of leaving a wagon-load of brandy where foragers would be sure to find it had had results, despite Belisarius' well-known strictness with drunken soldiers.

The bags of sulphur paste were brought out.

"All ready?" Padway asked. "Light the first bag." The oil-soaked rags were lit. The bag was placed in the sling. Padway himself pulled the lanyard. *Wht-bam!* said Brunhilde. The bag did a fiery parabola. Padway raced up the little knoll that masked his position. He missed seeing the bag land in the camp. But the drunken songs ended; in-

stead, there was a growing buzz as of a nest of irritated hornets. Behind him whips cracked and ropes creaked in the dark, as the horses heaved on the block-and-tackle he'd rigged up for quick re-cocking. *Wht-bam!* The fuse came out of the second bag in midair, so that it continued its course to the camp unseen and harmless. Never mind, another would follow in a few seconds. Another did. The buzz was louder, and broken by clear, high-pitched commands.

"Liuderis!" Padway called. "Give your signal!"

Over in the camp, the horse lines began to scream. The horses didn't like the sulphur dioxide. Good; maybe the Imperialist calvary would be immobilized. Under the other noises Padway heard the clank and shuffle of the Goths. getting under way. Something in the camp was burning brightlv. Its light showed a company of Goths on Padway's right picking their way over the broken, weed-covered ground. Their big round shields were painted white for recognition, and every man had a wet rag tied over his nose. Padway thought they ought to be able to frighten the Imperialists if they couldn't do anything else. On all sides, the night was alive with the little orange twinkle of firelight on helmets, scale shirts and sword blades.

As the Goths closed in, the noise increased tenfold, with the addition of organized battle yells, the flat snap of bowstrings, and finally the blacksmith's symphony of metal on metal. Padway could see "his" men, black against the fires, grow smaller and then drop out of sight into the camp ditch. Then there was only a confused blur of movement and a great din as the attackers scrambled up the other side—invisible until they popped up into the firelight again—and mixed it with the defenders.

One of the engineers called to say that that was all the sulphur bags, and what should they do now? "Stand by for further orders," replied Padway.

"But, captain, can't we go fight? We're missing all the fun!"

"*Ni,* you can't! You're the only engineer corps west of the Adriatic that's worth a damn, and I won't have you getting yourselves killed off!"

"Huh!" said a voice in the dark. "This is a cowardly way of doing, standing back here. Let's go, boys. To hell with Mysterious Martinus!" And before Padway could do anything, the twenty-odd catapult men trotted off toward the fires.

Padway angrily called for his horse and rode off to find Liuderis. The commander was sitting his horse in front of a solid mass of lancers. The firelight picked out their helms and faces and shoulders, and the forest of verticle lances.

Padway asked: "Has there been any sign of a sortie yet?"

"No."

"There will be, if I know Belisarius. Who's going to lead this troop?"

"I am."

"Oh, lord! I thought I explained why the commander should—"

"I know, Martinus," said Liuderis firmly. "You have lots of ideas. But you're young. I'm an old soldier, you know. Honor requires that I lead my men. Look, isn't something doing in the camp?"

True enough, the Imperial cavalry was coming out. Belisarius had, despite his difficulties, managed to collect a body of manageable horses and cuirassiers to ride them. As they watched, this group thundered out the main gate, the Gothic infantry scattering in all directions before them. Liuderis shouted and the mass of Gothic knights clattered off, picking up speed as they went. Padway saw the Imperialists swing widely take the attacking foe in the rear, and then Liuderis' men hid them. He heard the crash as the forces met, and then everything was dark confusion for a few minutes.

With a few mental disparagements of sixth-century ideas of warfare, Padway trotted toward the camp. He found a considerable body of dismounted Imperial cuirassiers standing weaponless.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

One replied: "We're prisoners. There were some Goths supposed to be guarding us, but they were angry at missing the looting, so they went off to the camp."

"What became of Belisarius?"

The prisoner indicated a man sitting on the ground with his head in his hands. "A Goth hit him on the head and stunned him. He's just coming to. Do you know what will be done with us, noble sir?"

"Nothing very drastic, I imagine. You fellows wait here until I send somebody for you." Padway rode on toward the camp. Soldiers were strange people, he thought. With Belisarius to lead them and a fair chance to use their famous bow-plus-lance tactics, the *cataphracti* could lick thrice their number of any other troops. Now, because

their leader had been conked on the head, they were as meek as lambs.

There were more corpses and wounded near the camp, and a few riderless horses calmly grazing. In the camp itself were Imperial soldiers, Isaurians and Moors and Huns, standing around in little clumps, holding bits of clothing to their noses against the reek of sulphur fumes. Goths ran hither and thither among them looking for movable property worth stealing.

Padway dismounted and asked a couple of the looters where Liuderis was. They said they didn't know, and went on about their business. He found an officer he knew, Gaina by name. Gaina was squatting by a corpse and weeping. He turned a streaked, bearded face up to Padway.

"Liuderis is dead," he said between sobs. "He was killed in the mêlée when we struck the Greek cavalry."

"Who's that?" Padway indicated the corpse.

"My younger brother."

"I'm sorry. But won't you come with me and get things organized? There are a hundred cuirassiers out there with nobody guarding them."

"No, I will stay with my little brother. You go on, Martinus. You can take care of things." Gaina dissolved in fresh tears.

Padway hunted until he found another officer, Gudareths, who seemed to have some sort of wits about him. At least he was making frantic efforts to round up a few troopers to guard the surrendered Imperialists. The minute he turned his back on his men, they melted off into the general confusion of the camp.

Padway grabbed him. "Forget them," he snapped. "Liuderis is dead, but Belisarius is alive. If we don't nab him—"

They took a handful of Goths in tow and walked back to where the Imperial general still sat among his men. They moved the lesser prisoners away and set several men to guard Belisarius. Then they put in a solid hour rounding up troopers and prisoners and getting them into some sort of order.

The train of troops and prisoners headed north on the Latin Way. Padway, still a little bewildered to find himself in command of the Gothic army, simply by virtue of having taken over Liuderis' responsibilities on the night of confusion, rode near the front.

Belisarius, jogging along beside him, was even less cheerful.

He said gravely: "Excellent Martinus, I ought to thank you for the consideration you showed my wife. You went out of your way to make her comfortable on this sad journey."

"Quite all right, illustrious Belisarius. Maybe you'll capture me some day."

"That seems hardly likely, after this fiasco. By the way, if I may ask, just what are you? I hear you called Mysterious Martinus! You're no Goth, nor yet an Italian, by your speech."

Padway gave his impressively vague formula about America.

"Really? They must be a people skilled in war, these Americans. I knew when the fight started that I wasn't dealing with any barbarian commander. The timing was much too good, especially on that cavalry charge. *Phew!* I can still smell that damnable sulphur!"

Padway saw no point in explaining that his previous military experience consisted of one year of R.O.T.C. in a Chicago high school. He asked: "How would you like the idea of coming over to our side? We need a good general, and as Thiudahad's quæstor, I'll have my hands full otherwise."

Belisarius frowned. "No, I swore an oath to Justinian."

Padway argued. But, remembering his Procopius, he had little hope of shaking the Thracian's stern rectitude.

They marched into Rome by the Latin Gate, north past the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum, and up the Quirinal Valley to the Old Viminal Gate and the Pretorian Camp.

CHAPTER XI

After some searching, Padway located Thiudahad in the Ulpian Library. The little man was barricaded behind a huge pile of books.

Thiudahad looked up blearily. "Oh, yes, it's the publisher chap. Martinus, isn't it?"

"That's right, my lord. I might add that I'm your new quæstor."

"What? Who told you so?"

"You appointed me."

"Oh, dear me, so I did. When I get engrossed in books, I really

don't know what's going on. Let's see, you and Liuderis were going to fight the Imperialists, weren't you?"

"Hoc ille, my lord. It's all over."

"Really? I suppose you sold out to Belisarius, didn't you? I hope you arranged for an estate and an annuity from Justinian for me."

"It wasn't necessary, my lord. We won."

"What?"

Padway gave a résumé of the last three days' events. "And you'd better get to bed early tonight, my lord. We're leaving in the morning for Florence."

"Florence? Why, in heaven's name?"

"We're on our way to intercept your generals, Asinar and Grippas. They're coming back from Dalmatia, having been scared out by the Imperial general, Constantianus. If we can catch them before they get to Ravenna and learn about Wittigis, we might be able to get your crown back."

Thiudahad sighed. "Yes, I suppose we ought to. But how did you know that Asimar and Grippas were coming home?"

"Trade secret, my lord. I've also sent a force of two thousand to reoccupy Naples. It's held by General Herodianus with a mere three hundred, so there shouldn't be much trouble."

Thiudahad narrowed his watery eyes. "You do get things done, Martinus. If you can deliver that vile usurper Wittigis into my hands —*aaah!* I'll send clear to Constantinople for a torturer, if I can't fine one ingenious enough in Italy!"

Padway did not answer that one, having his own plans for Wittigis. He said instead: "I have a pleasant surprise for you. The pay chests of the Imperial army—"

"Yes?" Thiudahad's eyes gleamed. "They're mine, of course. Very considerate of you, excellent Martinus."

"Well, I did have to dip into them a little to pay our troops and clear up the army's bills. But you'll find the rest an agreeable addition to the royal purse. I'll be waiting for you at home."

Padway neglected to state that he had sequestered over half the remainder and deposited the money with Thomasus.

Padway rode up to Cornelius Anicius' home. Its rhetorical owner was out at the baths, but Dorothea came out.

She said: "You know, Martinus, father was silly at first about

your social standing. But after all you've done, he's forgotten about that. Of course he is not enthusiastic about Gothic rule But he much prefers Thiudahad, who *is* a scholar, to that savage Wittigis."

"I'm glad of that. I like your old man."

"Everybody's talking about you now. They call you 'Mysterious Martinus.'"

"I know. Absurd, isn't it?"

"Yes. You never seemed very mysterious to me, in spite of your foreign background."

"That's great. You're not afraid of me, are you?"

"Not in the least. If you make a deal with Satanas as some people hint, I'm sure the Devil got the worst of it." They laughed. She added: "It's nearly dinner time. Won't you stay? Father will be back any time."

"I'm sorry, but I can't possibly. We're off to the wars again tomorrow."

As he rode away, he thought: If I *should change* my mind about the expediency of marriage, I'd know where to begin.

Padway made one more attempt to convert Belisarius, but without success. He did, however, enlist five hundred of the Imperial cuirassiers as a personal guard.

The trip to Florence was anything but pleasant. It rained most of the way, with intermittent snow squalls as they climbed toward the City of Flowers. Being in a hurry, Padway took only cavalry.

In Florence he sent his officers around to buy warmer clothes for the troops, and looked in on his business. It seemed to be thriving, though Fritharik said: "I don't trust any of them, excellent boss. I'm sure the foreman and this George Menandrus have been stealing, though I can't prove it. I don't understand all this writing and figuring."

"We'll see," said Padway. He called in the treasurer, Proclus Proclus, and asked to see the books. Proclus Proclus instantly looked apprehensive, but he got the books. Padway plunged into the figures. They were all nice and neat, since he himself had taught the treasurer double-entry bookkeeping. And—his employees were astounded to hear Padway burst into a shout of laughter.

"What . . . what is it, noble sir?" asked Proclus Proclus.

"Why, you poor fool, didn't you realize that with my system of bookkeeping, your little thefts would stick up in the accounts like a sore toe? You might just as well have left a signed receipt every time you stole something!"

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Well—I *ought* to have you jailed and flogged." Padway sat silent for a while and watched Proclus Proclus squirm. "But I hate to have your family suffer. So I'll just take a third of your salary until these little *borrowings* of yours are paid back."

"Thank you, thank you kindly, sir. But just to be fair—George Menandrus ought to pay a share of it, too. He—"

"Liar!" shouted the editor.

"How about it, George?" asked Padway.

Menandrus finally confessed, though he insisted that the thefts were merely temporary loans to tide him over until pay day.

Padway divided the total liability between the two of them. Then he left a set of plans with the foreman for new machines and metal-working processes, including plans for a machine for spinning copper plate into bowls. The intelligent Nerva caught on immediately.

As Padway was leaving, Fritharik asked him: "Can't I go with you, excellent Martinus? It's very dull here in Florence. And you need somebody to take care of you."

"No, old man. I'm sorry, but I've got to have *one* person I can trust here. When this damned war is over, we'll see."

At Padua, they found they had missed the Dalmatian force by one day. Thiudahad wanted to halt. "Martinus," he whined, "you've dragged my old bones all over northern Italy, and nearly frozen me to death. You do owe your king some consideration, don't you?"

Padway repressed his irritation with some effort. "My lord, *do you* or *don't you* want your crown back?"

So poor Thiudahad had to go along. By hard riding, they caught up with the Dalmatian army halfway to Atria. They trotted past thousands and thousands of Goths, afoot and horseback. The Goths cheered Thiudahad and Padway's Gothic lancers, and stared and muttered at the five hundred cuirassiers.

Padway found the two commanders up near the head of the column. Asinar was tall and Grippas was short, but otherwise they

were just a couple of middle-aged and bewhiskered barbarians. Thiudahad introduced Padway as his new prefect—no, he meant his new quæstor.

Asinar said to Padway: "In Padua, we heard a rumor that a civil war and usurpation had been going on in Italy. Just what *is* the news, anyway?"

Padway was for once thankful that his telegraph hadn't been operating that far north. He laughed scornfully. "Oh, our brave General Wittigis shut himself up in Ravenna, where the Greeks couldn't get him, and had himself proclaimed king. We've cleaned up the Greeks, and are on our way to settle with Wittigis now. Your boys will be a help."

They marched into Ravenna at noon the day after next. A Goth in a rich red cloak ran out to the head of the column. He shouted: "What the devil's going on here? Have you captured Thiudahad, or is it the other way around?"

Asinar and Grippas sat on their horses and said: "Uh . . . well . . . that is—"

Padway spurred up front and asked: "Who are you, my dear sir?"

"If it's any of your business, I'm Unilas Wiljarith's son, general to our lord Wittigis, King of the Goths and Italians. Now who are *you?*"

Padway replied smoothly: "I'm delighted to know you, General Unilas. I'm Martin Paduei, quæstor to our lord Thiudahad, King of the Goths and Italians. Now that we know each other—"

"But, you fool, there isn't any King Thiudahad! He was deposed! We've got a new king! Or hadn't you heard about it?"

"Oh, I've heard lots of things. But, my excellent Unilas, before you make any more rude remarks, consider that we—that is to say King Thiudahad—have over sixty thousand troops in Ravenna, whereas you have about twelve thousand. You don't want any unnecessary unpleasantness, do you?"

"Why, you impudent . . . did you say *sixty* thousand?"

"Maybe seventy; I haven't counted them."

"Oh. That's different. What are you going to do?"

"Well, if you can tell where *General* Wittigis is, I thought we might pay him a call."

"He's getting married today. I think he ought to be on his way

to St. Vitalis' Church about now."

"Quick, how do you get to St. Vitalis' Church?"

Padway hadn't hoped to be in time to interfere with Wittigis attempt to engraft himself on the Amal family tree by his forcible marriage of the late Queen Amalaswentha's daughter. But this was too good an opportunity to let slip.

Unilas pointed out a dome flanked by two towers. Padway shouted to his guard and kicked his horse into a canter. The five hundred men galloped after, spattering unfortunate pedestrians with mud. They thundered across a bridge over one of Ravenna's canals and up to the door of St. Vitalis' Church.

Padway marched into St. Vitalis' Church with a hundred cuirassiers at his heels. The organ music died with a wail as people turned to look at him.

In the center of the huge octagon was a pickle-faced Arian bishop, and three people stood before him. One was a big man in a long, rich robe, with a crown on his dark graying hair: King Wittigis. Another was a tallish girl with a strawberries-and-cream complexion and her hair in thick golden braids: the Princess Mathaswentha. The third was an ordinary Gothic soldier, somewhat cleaned up, who stood beside the bride and held her arm behind her back. The audience was a handful of Gothic nobles and their ladies.

The bishop spoke up: "Young man, what is the meaning of this intrusion?"

Padway laughed his most irritating laugh. "I'm Martinus Paduei, quæstor to King Thiudahad. Ravenna is in our hands and prudent persons will comport themselves accordingly. As for the wedding, it isn't normally necessary to assign a man to twist the bride's arm to make sure she gives the right answers. You don't want to marry this man, do you, my lady?"

Mathaswentha jerked her arm away from the soldier. Then she swung at Wittigis, who dodged back. "You beast!" she cried. "I'll claw your eyes—"

The bishop grabbed her arm. "Calm yourself, my daughter! Please! In the house of God—"

King Wittigis had been blinking at Padway gradually soaking in the news. He growled: "You're trying to tell me that the miserable pen-pusher, Thiudahad, has taken the town? *My* town?"

"That, my lord, is the general idea. I fear you'll have to give up your idea of becoming an Amaling and ruling the Goths. But we'll—"

Wittigis' face had been turning darker and darker red. "You think I'll hand over my crown and bride peaceably? I'll see you in the hottest hell first!" He whipped out his sword and ran heavily at Padway, his gold-embroidered robe flapping.

Padway was not entirely taken by surprise. He got his own sword out and parried Wittigis' terrific downward cut easily enough, though the force of the blow almost disarmed him. "Grab him, boys! Don't hurt him!"

Wittigis struggled like a captive gorilla, even when five men were hanging onto him, and he bellowed and foamed all the while.

"Tie him up until he cools off," said Padway. "My lord bishop, may I trouble you for pen and paper?"

The bishop looked bleakly at Padway and called a sexton, who led Padway to a room off the vestibule. Here he sat down and wrote:

My dear Thomasus: I am sending you with this letter the person of Wittigis, former King of the Goths and Italians. His escort has orders to deliver him to your house secretly, so forgive me for any alarm they cause you.

As I remember, we have a telegraph tower under construction on the Flaminian Way near Helvillum. Please arrange to have a chamber constructed in the earth underneath this tower and fitted up as an apartment forthwith. Incarnate Wittigis therein with an adequate guard. Have him made as comfortable as possible, as I judge him a man of moody temperament and I do not wish him to harm himself.

The utmost secrecy is to be observed at all times. That should not be too difficult, as this tower is in a wild stretch of country. It would be advisable to have Wittigis delivered to the tower by guards other than those who take him to Rome and to have him guarded by men who speak neither Latin nor Gothic. They shall release their prisoner only on my order, delivered either in person or via the telegraph, or without orders in the event of my imprisonment or death.

With best regards,

MARTINUS PADUEI

Padway said to Wittigis: "I'm sorry to have to treat you so roughly, my lord. I would not have interfered if I hadn't known it was necessary to save Italy."

Wittigis had relapsed into morose taciturnity.

Padway continued: "I'm really doing you a favor, you know. If Thiudahad got hold of you, you would die—slowly."

There was still no reply.

"Oh, well, take him away boys. Wrap him up so the people won't recognize him, and use the back streets."

Thiudahad peered moistly at Padway. "Marvelous, marvelous, my dear Martinus. The Royal Council accepted the inevitable. Now I can devote my time to some really scholarly research. But what did you do with Wittigis?"

Padway put on a benign smile. "He's out of your reach, my lord king."

"You mean you killed him? Most inconsiderate of you, Martinus. I told you I'd promised myself a nice long session with him in the torture chambers—"

"He's where you'll never find him. You see, I figured it would be foolish to waste a good spare king. If anything happened to you, I might need one in a hurry."

"You're insubordinate, young man! You'll do as your king orders you, or else—"

Padway grinned. "No, my lord. Nobody shall hurt Wittigis. And you'd better not get rough with me, either. His guards have orders to release him if anything happens to me."

"You devil!" spat the king venomously. "Why, oh, why did I ever let you save my life? I haven't had a moment's peace since. You might have a little consideration for an old man," he whined. "Let's see, what was I talking about?"

"Perhaps," said Padway, "about the new book we're going to get out in our joint names. It has a perfectly splendid theory about the mutual attraction of masses. Accounts for the movements of the heavenly bodies and all sorts of things. It's called the law of gravitation."

"Really? Now that's most interesting, Martinus, most interesting. It would spread my fame as a philosopher to the ends of the earth, wouldn't it?"

Padway asked Unilas if Wittigis' nephew Urias was in Ravenna. Unilas said yes and sent a man to hunt him up.

Urias was big and dark like his uncle. He arrived scowling defiance. "Well, Mysterious Martinus, now that you've overthrown my uncle by trickery, what are you going to do with me?"

"Not a thing," said Padway. "Unless you force me to."

"Aren't you having a purge of my uncle's family?"

"No. I'm not even purging your uncle. In strict confidence, I'm hiding Wittigis to keep Thiudahad from harming him."

Urias relaxed visibly. "If that's true, perhaps you have some decency, after all."

"How do you feel about working for us—that is, nominally for Thiudahad but actually for me?"

Urias stiffened. "I won't take any action disloyal to my uncle."

"I need a good man to command the reoccupation of Dalmatia."

"It's a question of loyalty. I've never gone back on my plighted word yet."

Padway sighed. "You're as bad as Belisarius. The few trustworthy and able men in this world won't work with me because of previous obligations. So I have to struggle along with crooks and dimwits."

Darkness seemed to want to fall by mere inertia—

CHAPTER XII

Little by little, Ravenna's temporary population flowed away. A big trickle flowed north, as fifty thousand Goths marched back toward Dalmatia. Padway prayed that Asinar, who seemed to have little more glimmering of intelligence than Grippas, would not have another brainstorm and come rushing back to Italy before he'd accomplished anything.

Padway did not dare leave Italy long enough to take command of the campaign himself. He did what he could by sending some of his personal guard along to teach the Goths horse-archery tactics.

Padway finally found time to pay his respects to Mathaswentha. He told himself that he was merely being polite and making a useful contact. But he knew that actually he didn't want to leave Ravenna without another look at the luscious wench.

The Gothic princess received him graciously. She spoke excellent Latin, in a rich contralto. "I thank you, excellent Martinus, for saving me from that beast. I shall never be able to repay you properly."

"It was very little, my lady," he said. "We just happened to arrive at an opportune time."

"Don't deprecate yourself, Martinus. It takes a real man to accomplish all you have. Especially when one considers that you arrived in Italy, a stranger, only a little over a year ago."

"At the present rate, God knows when I'll get time for anything but war and politics, neither of which is my proper trade."

"What is, then?"

"I was a gatherer of facts, a kind of historian of periods that had no history. I suppose you could call me a historical philosopher."

"You're a fascinating person. Martinus. I can see why they call you Mysterious. But if you don't like war and politics, why do you engage in them?"

"That would be hard to explain, my lady. In the course of my work in my own country, I had occasion to study the rise and fall of many civilizations. In looking around me here, I see many symptoms of a fall."

"Really? That's a strange thing to say. Of course, my own people, and barbarians like the Franks, have occupied most of the Western Empire. But they're not a danger to civilization. They protect it from the real wild men like the Bulgarian Huns and the Slavs."

"You're entitled to your opinion, my lady," said Padway. "I merely put together such facts as I have and draw what conclusions I can. Facts such as the decline in the population of Italy, despite the Gothic immigrations. And such things as the volume of shipping."

"Shipping? I never thought of measuring civilization *that* way. But in any event, that doesn't answer my question."

"Well, I want to prevent the darkness of barbarism from falling over western Europe. It sounds conceited, the idea that one man could do anything like that. But I can try. One of the weaknesses of our present set-up is slow communication. So I promote the telegraph company. And because my backers are Roman patricians suspected of Græcophile leanings, I find myself in politics up to my neck. One thing leads to another, until today I'm practically running Italy."

Mathaswentha looked thoughtful. "I suppose the trouble with slow communication is that a general can revolt or an invader overrun the border weeks before the central government hears about it."

"Right. I can see you're your mother's daughter. If I wanted to patronize you, I should say that you had a man's mind."

She smiled. "On the contrary, I should be very much pleased. At least, if you mean a man like yourself. Most of the men around here —*bah!* Squalling infants, without one idea among them. When I marry, it must be to a man—shall we say both of thought and action?"

Padway met her eyes, and was aware that his heart had stepped up several beats per minute. "I hope you find him, princess."

"I may yet." She sat up straight and looked at him directly, almost defiantly, quite unconcerned with the inner confusion she was causing him. "That's one reason I'm so grateful to you for saving me from the beast. What became of him, by the way? Don't pretend innocence, Martinus. Everybody knows your guards took him into the vestibule of the church and then he apparently vanished."

"He's safe, I hope, both from our point of view and his."

"You mean you hid him? Death would have been safer yet."

"I had reasons for not wanting him killed."

"You did? I give you fair warning that if he ever falls into my hands, I shall not have such reasons."

"Aren't you a bit hard on poor old Wittigis? He was merely trying, in his own muddle-headed way, to defend the kingdom."

"Perhaps. But after that performance in the church, I hate him." The gray eyes were cold as ice. "And when I hate, I don't do it halfway."

"So I see," said Padway, jarred out of the pink fog for the moment. But then Mathaswentha smiled again, all curvesome and desirable woman. "You'll stay to dinner, of course? There will only be a few people, and they'll leave early."

"Why—" There were piles of work to be done that evening. "Thank you, my lady, I shall be delighted."

By his third visit to Mathaswentha, Padway was saying to himself: There's a real woman. Ravishing good looks, forceful character, keen brain. The man who gets her will have one in a million. Why shouldn't I be the one? She seems to like me. With her to back me up, there's nothing I couldn't accomplish. Of course, she *is* a bit bloodthirsty. You wouldn't exactly describe her as a "sweet" girl.

But that's the fault of the times, not of her. She'll settle down when she has a man of her own to do her fighting for her.

In other words, Padway was as thoroughly in love as such a rational and prudent man can ever be.

He asked: "Matheswentha, my dear, when you spoke of the kind of man you'd like to marry, did you have any other specifications in mind?"

She laughed a rich, throaty laugh. "Martinus, you *are* the funniest man. I suppose it's that you and I are different. I go directly for what I want, whether it's love, or revenge or anything else."

"What do I do?"

"You walk all around it, and peer at it from every angle, and spend a week figuring out whether you want it badly enough to risk taking it." She added quickly: "Don't think I mind. I like you for it."

"I'm glad of that."

"Nor do I mind little red beards or wavy brown hair or any of the other features of an amazing young man named Martinus Paduei. That's what you were getting at, wasn't it?"

Padway knew a great relief. This marvelous woman went out of her way to ease your difficulties! "As a matter of fact it was, princess."

"You needn't be so frightfully respectful. Martinus. Anybody would know you are a foreigner, the way you meticulously use all the proper titles and epithets."

Padway grinned. "I don't like to take chances. as you know. Well, you see, I—uh—was wondering—uh—if you don't dislike these—uh—characteristics, whether you couldn't learn to—uh—uh—"

"You don't by any chance mean love, do you?"

"Yes!" said Padway loudly.

"With practice, I might."

"*Whew!*" said Padway, mopping his forehead.

"I'd need teaching," said Mathaswentha. "I've lived a sheltered life and know little of the world."

"I looked up the law," said Padway quickly, "and while there's an ordinance against marriage of Goths to Italians, there's nothing about Americans. So—"

Mathaswentha interrupted: "I could hear you better, dear Martinus, if you came closer."

Padway went over and sat down beside her. He began again: "The Edicts of Theoderik—"

She said softly: "I know the laws, Martinus. That is not what I need instruction in."

Her eyes were half closed, her mouth slightly open, and her breath was quick and shallow. She whispered: "Do the Americans practice the art of kissing as we do?"

He gathered her in and showed her.

Mathaswentha opened her eyes, blinked and shook her head. "That was a foolish question, my dear Martinus. The Americans are way ahead of us." She laughed joyfully. Padway laughed too.

Padway said: "You've made me very happy, princess."

"You've made me happy, too, my prince. I thought I should never find anyone like you." She swayed into his arms again.

Mathaswentha sat up and patted her hair. She said in a brisk, businesslike manner: "There are a lot of questions to be settled before we decide anything finally. Wittigis, for instance."

"What about him?" Padway's happiness suddenly wasn't quite so complete.

"He'll have to be killed, naturally. I warned you that I am no half-hearted hater. And Thiudahad, too."

"Why him?"

She straightened up, frowning. "He murdered my mother, didn't he? What more reason do you want? And eventually you will want to become king yourself—"

"No, I won't," said Padway.

"Not want to be king? Why, Martinus!"

"Not for me, my dear. Anyhow, I'm not an Amaling."

"As my husband, you will be considered one."

"I still don't want—"

"Now, darling, you just *think* you don't. While we are about it, there is that former serving-wench of yours, Julia I think her name is—"

"What about—what do you know about her?"

"Enough. And don't think that a person like me would be jealous of a mere house-servant. But it would be a humiliation to me if she were living after our marriage. It needn't be a painful death—some quick poison . . ."

He knew now that he was not in the least in love with Mathaswentha. Let some roaring Goth have this fierce blond Valkyr!

"Well?" said Mathaswentha.

"I just remembered," he said, "I have a wife back in America."

"Oh. This is a fine time to think of *that*," she answered coldly.

"I haven't seen her for a long time."

"Martinus!" Her eyes were a pair of gray blow-torches. "You're afraid. You're trying to back out. No man shall ever do that to me and live to tell—"

"No, no, not at all!" cried Padway. "Nothing of the sort, my dear! I'd wade through rivers of blood to reach your side. It was stupid of me not to think of this obstacle sooner."

"If you haven't seen her for so long, how do you know she's alive?"

"I don't. But I don't know that she isn't. You know how strict your laws are about bigamy. Edicts of Athalarik. Paragraph Six. I looked it up."

"You would," she said with some bitterness. "Does anyone else in Italy know about this American bitch of yours?"

"N-no—but—"

"Then aren't you being a bit silly, Martinus? What difference does it make, if she's on the other side of the earth?"

Padway seeing the fires about to flare up again, said: "I just thought of a solution. I'll send a messenger to America to find out whether my wife is still alive."

"How long will that take?"

"Weeks. Months, perhaps. If you really love me, you won't mind waiting."

"I'd wait," she said without enthusiasm. She looked up sharply. "Suppose your messenger finds the woman alive?"

"We'll worry about that when the time comes."

"Oh, but, Martinus!" she cried cheerfully. "You shall instruct your messenger, if he finds her alive, to poison her! I'd prefer it to a mere divorce anyway, for the sake of my good name. Now all our worries are over." She hugged him with disconcerting violence.

"I suppose they are," said Padway with an utter lack of conviction.

"You will forgive me for getting a little upset just now. I am

but an innocent young girl, with no knowledge of the world and no will of her own."

At least, thought Padway, he was not the only liar present. He stood up and pulled her to her feet. "I must go now. I'll send the messenger off the first thing. And tomorrow I leave for Rome."

"Oh, Martinus! You surely don't have to go. You just *think* you do—"

"No, really. State business, you know. I'll think of you all the way."

But Padway did not get off to Rome the next day, or even the day after that. He began to learn that the position of king's quæstor was not just a nice well-paying job that let you order people around and do as you pleased. First Wakkis Thurumund's son, a Gothic noble of the Royal Council, came around with a rough draft of a proposed amendment to the law against horse stealing.

Padway wondered what the devil to do; then he dug up Cassiodorus, who as head of the Italian Civil Service ought to know the ropes. The old scholar proved a great help, though Padway saw fit to edit some of the unnecessary flowery phases of the prefect's draft.

He asked Urias around for lunch. Urias came and was friendly enough, though still somewhat bitter about the treatment of his uncle Wittigis. Padway liked him. He thought, I can't hold out on Mathaswentha indefinitely. And I shan't dare take up with another girl while she looks on me as a suitor. But this fellow is big and good-looking, and he seems intelligent. If I could engineer a match—

Padway asked casually: "Have you ever met the Princess Mathaswentha?"

"Not formally. I arrived in Ravenna only a few days ago for the wedding. I saw her in the church, of course, when you barged in. She's attractive, isn't she?"

"Quite so. She's a person worth knowing. If you like, I'll try to arrange a meeting."

Padway, as soon as Urias had gone, rushed around to Mathaswentha's house. He contrived to make his arrival look as unpremeditated as possible. He started to explain: "I've been delayed, my dear. I may not get off to Rome *ubb*—" Mathaswentha had slid her arms around his neck and stopped his little speech in the most effective manner.

She finally said: "Now, what were you saying, my dearest?"

Padway finished his statement. "So I thought I'd drop in for a moment." He laughed. "It's just as well I'm going to Rome; I shall never get any work done as long as I'm in the same city with you. Do you know Wittigis' nephew Urias, by the way?"

"No. And I'm not sure I want to. When we kill Wittigis, we shall naturally have to consider killing his nephews, too. I have a silly prejudice against murdering people I know socially."

"He's a splendid young man; you'd really like him. He's one Goth with both brains and character, probably the only one."

"Well, I don't know—"

"And I need him in my business, only he's got scruples against working for me. I thought maybe you could work your flashing smile on him, to soften him up a bit."

"If you think I could really help you, perhaps—"

Thus the Gothic princess had Padway and Urias for company at dinner that night. Mathaswentha was pretty cool to Urias at first. But they drank a good deal of wine, and she unbent.

CHAPTER XIII

Back in Rome, Padway went to see his captive Imperial generals. They were comfortably housed and seemed well enough pleased with their situation, though Belisarius was moody and abstracted.

Padway asked him: "As you can see, we shall soon have a powerful state here; have you changed your mind about joining us?"

"No, my lord quæstor. An oath is an oath."

"If for any reason you should swear an oath to me, I suppose you'd consider yourself as firmly bound by it as by the others, wouldn't you?"

"Naturally. But that's a ridiculous supposition."

"Perhaps. How would it be if I offered you parole and transportation back to Constantinople, on condition that you never again bear arms against the kingdom of the Goths and Italians?"

"You're a crafty and resourceful man, Martinus. I thank you for the offer, but I couldn't square it with my oath to Justinian. There-

fore I must decline."

Padway repeated his offer to the other generals. Constantianus, Perianus and Bessas accepted at once. Padway's reasoning was as follows: These three were just fair-to-middling commanders. Justinian could get plenty more of that kind, so there was not much point in keeping them. Of course they'd violate their oaths as soon as they were out of his reach.

But Belisarius was a real military genius.

Justinian's clever but warped mind was unreasonably jealous of Belisarius' success and his somewhat stuffy virtue. When he learned that Belisarius had stayed behind in Rome rather than give a parole that he'd be expected to break, the emperor *might* be sufficiently annoyed to do something interesting.

Padway wrote:

King Thiudahad to the Emperor Justinian, Greetings.

Your serene highness: We send you with this letter the persons of your generals Constantianus, Perianus, and Bessas, under parole not to bear arms against us again. A similar parole was offered your general Belisarius, but he declined to accept it on grounds of his personal honor.

As continuation of this war seems unlikely to achieve any constructive result, we take the oportunity of stating the terms that we should consider reasonable for the establishment of eduring peace between us.

1. Imperial troops shall evacuate Sicily and Dalmatia forthwith.
2. An indemnity of one hundred thousand solidi in gold shall be paid us for damages done by your invading armies.
3. We shall agree never again to make war, one upon the other, without mutual consultation in advance. Details can be settled in due course.
4. We shall agree not to assist any third parties, by men, money, or munitions, which hereafter shall make war upon either of us.
5. We shall agree upon a commercial treaty to facilitate the exchange of goods between our respective realms.

We shall anticipate the gracious favor of a reply at your serenity's earliest convenience.

by MARTINUS PADUEI, Quæstor

When he saw who his visitor was, Thomasus got up with a grunt and waddled toward him, good eye sparkling and hand outstretched. "Martinus! It's good to see you again. How does it feel to be important?"

"Wearisome," said Padway, shaking hands. "What's the news?"

"News? Listen to that! He's been making most of the news in

Italy for the past two months, and he wants to know what the news is!"

"I mean about our little bird in a cage."

"Huh? Oh, you mean"—Thomasus looked around cautiously—"ex-King Wittigis? He was doing fine at last reports, though nobody's been able to get a civil word out of him. Listen, Martinus, of all the lousy tricks I ever heard of, springing the job of hiding him was the worst. Those soldiers dragged me out of bed, and then I had them and their prisoner around the house for several days."

"I'm sorry, Thomasus. But you were the only man in Rome I felt I could trust absolutely."

"Oh, well, if you put it that way. But Wittigis was the worst grouch I ever saw."

"How's the telegraph company coming?"

"That's another thing. The Naples line is working regularly. But the lines to Ravenna and Florence won't be finished for a month, and until they are, there's no chance of a profit. *And* the minority stockholders have discovered that they're a minority. You should have heard them howl!"

"I'm going to start another paper as soon as I get time," said Padway. "There'll be two, one in Rome and one in Florence."

"Why one in Florence?"

"That's where our new capital's going to be."

"*What?*"

"Yes. It's better located than Rome with regard to roads and such, and it has a much better climate than Ravenna. In fact I can't think of a place that *hasn't* a better climate than Ravenna. I sold the idea to Cassiodorus, and between us we got Thiudahad to agree to move the administrative offices thither."

"All this activity takes my breath away. What else of revolutionary nature are you planning?"

"I'm going to try to start a school. We have a flock of teachers on the public pay roll now, but all they know is grammar and rhetoric. I'm going to try to have things taught that really matter: mathematics, and the sciences, and medicine. I see where I shall have to write all the textbooks myself."

"Just one question, Martinus. When do you find time to sleep?"

Padway grinned wanly. "Mostly I don't. But if I can ever get out

of all this political and military activity, I hope to catch up."

Jogging along the road to Florence again, Padway regretted that he had not seen Dorothea while he was in Rome. He had not dared.

But he had too much else to do now. He knew that his job rested on the unstable foundation of his influence over a senile, unpopular king. As long as Padway pleased them, the Goths would not interfere, as they were accustomed to leaving civil administration in the hands of non-Goths. But when Thiudahad went?

In Florence, Padway leased office space in the name of the government and looked in on his own business. This time there were no irregularities in the accounts. Either there had been no more stealing or the boys were getting cleverer at concealing it.

Fritharik renewed his plea to be allowed to come along. Padway, somewhat against his better judgment, gave in. He appointed the competent and apparently honest Nerva his general manager.

They were snowed in by a late storm for two days crossing the mountains, and arrived in Ravenna still shivering. The town with its clammy atmosphere and its currents of intrigue depressed him, and the Mathaswentha problem made him nervous. He called on her and made some insincere love to her, which made him all the more anxious to get away. But there was lots of public business to be handled.

Urias announced that he was ready to enter Padway's service. "Mathaswentha talked me into it," he said. "She's a wonderful woman, isn't she?"

"Certainly is," replied Padway. He thought he detected a faintly guilty and furtive air about the straightforward Urias when he spoke of the princess. He smiled to himself. "What I had in mind was setting up a regular military school for the Gothic officers, somewhat on the Byzantine model, with you in charge."

"What? I hoped you'd have a command on the frontiers for me."

"This job has to be done for the sake of the kingdom. And I can't do it myself, because the Goths don't think any non-Goth knows anything about soldiering."

"But, most excellent Martinus, have you ever tried to teach a Gothic officer anything? I admit that an academy is needed, but—"

"I know. Most of them can't read or write and look down on

those who do. That's why I picked *you* for the job. You're respected and if anybody can put sense into their heads, you can."

"Thanks. I see you know how to get people to do things for you."

Padway went on to tell Urias some of his ideas How the Goths' great weakness was the lack of co-ordination between their mounted lancers and their foot archers; how they needed both reliable foot spearmen and mounted archers to have a well-rounded force. He also described the crossbow. the calthorp and other military devices.

He said: "It takes five years to make a good long-bowman. whereas a recruit can learn to handle a crossbow in a few weeks. And if I can get some good steel workers, I'll show you a suit of plate armor that weighs only half as much as one of those scale-mail shirts, but gives better protection and allows fully as much freedom of action. You may expect grumbling at all these newtangled ideas from the more conservative Goths. So you'd better introduce them gradually. And remember. they're your ideas; I won't deprive you of the credit for them."

"I understand," grinned Urias. "So if anybody gets hanged for them. it'll be me and not you. Like that book on astronomy that came out in Thiudahad's name. It has every churchman from here to Persia sizzling. Poor old Thiudahad gets the blame. but *I* know you furnished the ideas and put him up to it. Very well, my mysterious friend. I'm game."

Urias appeared with a very respectable crossbow a few days later. They spent an afternoon in the great pine wood east of the city shooting at marks. Fritharik proved uncannily accurate, though he affected to despise missile weapons as unworthy of a noble Vandal knight. "But," he said, "it is a remarkably easy thing to aim."

"Yes," replied Padway. "Among my people there's a legend about a crossbowman who offended a government official and was compelled. as punishment, to shoot an apple off his son's head. He did so, without harming the boy."

When he got back, Padway learned that he had an appointment the next day with an envoy from the Franks. The envoy, one Count Hlodovik, was a tall, lantern-jawed man. Like most Franks, he was clean-shaven except for the mustache.

"Mother of God, I'm thirsty," he said. "Will you please do something about that, friend quæstor, before we discuss business?" So

Padway had some wine sent in. Hlodovik drank in deep gulps. "Ah! That's better. Now, friend quæstor, I may say that I don't think I've been very well treated here. The king would only see me for a wink of the eye; said you handle the business. Is that the proper reception for the envoy of King Theudebert, King Hildebert and King Hlotokar? Not just *one* king, mind you; *three.*"

"That's a lot of kings," said Padway, smiling pleasantly. "I am greatly impressed. But you mustn't take offense, my lord count. Our king is an old man and he finds the press of public business hard to bear."

"So, *hrrmp.* We'll forget about it, then. But we shall not find the reason for my coming hither so easy to forget. Briefly, what became of that hundred and fifty thousand solidi that Wittigis promised my master, Kink Theudebert, King Hildebert and King Hlotokar if they wouldn't attack him while he was involved with the Greeks? Moreover, he ceded Provence to my masters. King Theudebert, King Hildebert and King Hlotokar. Yet your general Sisigis has not evacuated Provence. When my masters sent a force to occupy it a few weeks ago, they were driven back. You should know that the Franks, who are the bravest and proudest people on earth, will never submit to such treatment. What are you going to do about it?"

Padway answered: "*You,* my lord Hlodovik, should know that the acts of an unsuccessful usurper cannot bind the legitimate government. We intend to hold what we have. So you may inform your masters, King Theudebert, King Hildebert and King Hlotokar, that there will be no payment and no evacuation."

Hlodovik seemed astonished. "Don't you know, young man, that the armies of the Franks could sweep the length of Italy, burning and ravaging, any time they wished? Think carefully before you invite disaster."

"I have thought, my lord," replied Padway. "And I respectfully suggest that you and your masters do the same. Especially about a little military device that we are introducing. Would you like to see it demonstrated?"

Padway had made the proper preparations in advance. When they arrived at the parade ground, Hlodovik weaving slightly all the way, they found Urias, Fritharik, the crossbow, and a supply of bolts. Padway's idea was to have Fritharik take a few demonstration shots

at a target. But Fritharik and Urias had other ideas. The latter walked off fifty feet, turned, and placed an apple on his head. Fritharik cocked the crossbow, put a bolt in the groove, and raised the bow to his shoulder.

Padway was frozen speechless with horror. He didn't dare shout at the two idiots to desist.

The crossbow snapped. There was a *splush* and fragments of apple flew about. Urias, grinning, picked pieces of apple out of his hair and walked back.

"Do you find the demonstration impressive, my lord?" Padway asked.

"Yes, quite," said Hlodovik. "Let's see that device. *Hm-m-m*. Of course, the brave Franks don't believe that any battle was ever won by a lot of silly arrows. But for hunting, now this mightn't be bad. How does it work? I see; you pull the string back to here—"

While Fritharik was demonstrating the crossbow, Padway took Urias aside and told him just what he thought of such a fool stunt. Urias tried to look serious, but couldn't help a faint, small-boy grin. Then there was another snap and something whizzed between them, not a foot from Padway's face. They jumped and spun around. Hlodovik was holding the crossbow, a foolish look on his long face. "I didn't know it went off so easily," he said.

Fritharik lost his temper. "What are you trying to do, you drunken fool? Kill somebody—"

"What's that? *You* call me a fool? Why—" and the Frank's sword came halfway out of the scabbard.

"Calm yourself, my lord!" cried Padway. "It's nothing to start a fight over. I'll apologize personally."

The Frank merely got madder and tried to shake off Padway. "I'll teach that low-born bastard! My honor is insulted!" he shouted. Several Gothic soldiers loafing around the field looked up and trotted over. Hlodovik saw them coming and put his sword back, growling: "This is fine treatment for the representative of King Theudebert, King Hildebert and King Hlotokar. Just wait till they hear of this."

Padway tried to mollify him, but Hlodovik merely grumped and soon left Ravenna. Padway dispatched a warning to Sisigis to be on the lookout for a Frankish attack.

Padway had long since decided that Thiudahad was a pathological case. But lately the little king was showing more definite signs of mental failure.

It was convenient in one way, as Thiudahad didn't bother him much. But it was awkward when the king simply refused to listen to him or sign anything.

Then Padway found himself in a hot dispute with a paymaster-general of the Gothic army. The latter refused to put the Imperialist mercenaries whom Padway had captured on the rolls. Padway argued that the men were first-rate soldiers who seemed glad enough to serve the Italo-Gothic state, and that it would cost little more to enlist them than to continue to feed them as prisoners.

Each stubbornly maintained his point, so the dispute was carried to Thiudahad. The king listened to the argument with a specious air of wisdom.

Then he sent the paymaster-general away and told Padway: "Lots to be said on both sides, dear sir. Now, if I decide in your favor, I shall expect a suitable command for my son, Thiudegiskel."

Padway was horrified, though he tried not to show it. "But, my lord king, what military experience has Thiudegiskel had?"

"None; that's just the trouble. Spends all his time drinking and wenching with his wild young friends. He needs a bit of responsibility. Something consistent with the dignity of his birth."

Padway argued some more. But he didn't dare say that he couldn't imagine a worse commander than this self-conceited and arrogant puppy. Thiudahad was obstinate. "Either you give him a command, or I decide in favor of the other man, what's-his-name. That is my final word."

So Padway gave in. Thiudegiskel was put in command of the Gothic forces in Calabria, where, Padway hoped, he wouldn't be able to do much harm.

Then three things happened.

General Sisigis sent word of suspicious activity among the Franks.

Padway got a letter from Thomasus, which told of an attempt on the life of ex-King Wittigis. The assassin had inexplicably sneaked into the dugout, where Wittigis, though silghtly wounded in the process, had killed him with his bare hands. Nobody knew who the assassin was until Wittigis had declared, with many a bloodcurdling

curse, that he recognized the man as an old-time secret agent of Thiudahad.

Finally Padway got a letter from Justinian. It read:

Flavius Anicius Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, to King Thiudahad, Greetings.

Our serenity's attention has been called to the terms which you propose for termination of the war between us.

We find these terms so absurd and unreasonable that our deigning to reply at all is an act of great condescension on our part. Our holy endeavor to recover for the Empire the provinces of western Europe, which belonged to our forebears and rightfully belong to us, will be carried through to a victorious conclusion.

As for our former general, Flavius Belisarius, his refusal of parole is an act of gross disloyalty, which we shall fittingly punish in due course. Meanwhile the illustrious Belisarius may consider himself free of all obligations to us. Nay, more, we order him to place himself unreservedly under the orders of that infamous heretic and agent of the Evil One who calls himself Martinus of Padua.

We are confident that, between the incompetence and cowardice of Belisarius and the heavenly wrath that will attach to those who submit to the unclean touch of the diabolical Martinus, the doom of the Gothic kingdom will not be long delayed.

Padway realized, with a slightly sick feeling, that he had a lot to learn about diplomacy. His defiance of Justinian, and of the Frankish kings, and of the Bulgars, had each been justified, considered by itself. But he shouldn't have committed himself to taking them on all at once.

CHAPTER XIV

Padway dashed back to Rome and showed Justinian's letter to Belisarius. He thought he had seldom seen a more unhappy man than the stalwart Thracian.

"I don't know," was all Belisarius would say in answer to his questions. "I shall have to think."

Padway got an interview with Belisarius' wife, Antonina. He got along fine with this slim, vigorous redhead.

She said: "I told him repeatedly that he'd get nothing but ingratitude from Justinian. But you know he is—reasonable about everything except what concerns his honor. But after this letter—

I'll do what I can, Martinus."

Belisarius, to Padway's unconcealed delight, finally capitulated.

The immediate danger point seemed to be Provence. Padway's runner-collecting service had gathered a story of another bribe paid by Justinian to the Franks to attack the Goths.

If there was going to be more war, Padway knew one invention that would settle it definitely in the Italo-Goths' favor. Gunpowder was made of sulphur, charcoal and saltpeter. Padway had learned that in the sixth grade. He did not know what proportions of the three ingredients made good gunpowder, and the only way to find out was by experiment.

He gave orders, in the government's name, for casting and boring a cannon. The brass foundry that took the job was not co-operative. They had never seen such a contraption and were not sure they could make it. The first one they delivered looked all right, until Padway examined the breach end closely. The metal here was spongy and pitted. The gun would have blown up the first time it was fired.

The trouble was that it had been cast muzzle down. The solution was to add a foot to the length of the barrel, cast it muzzle up, and saw off the last foot of flawed brass. He pestered the foundry daily until the second cannon appeared.

Early next morning, he and Fritharik and a couple of helpers mounted the cannon on a crude carriage of planks in a vacant space near the Viminal Gate. The helpers had previously piled up a sand-hill for a target, thirty feet from the gun.

Padway rammed several pounds of powder down the barrel, and a cast-iron ball after it. He filled the touch-hole.

He said in a low voice: "Fritharik, give me that candle. Now get back, everybody. Way over there and lie down. You, too, Fritharik."

"Never!" said Fritharik indignantly. "Desert my lord in the hour of danger? I should say not!"

"All right, if you want to chance being blown to bits. Here goes."

Padway touched the candle flame to the touch-hole.

The gun went *pfoomp!* The cannon-ball hopped from the muzzle, thumped to earth a yard away, rolled another yard, and stopped.

Back went the beautiful shiny new gun to Padway's house, to be put in the cellar.

In the early spring, Urias appeared in Rome. He explained that he'd left the military academy in the hands of subordinates and was coming down to see about raising a militia force of Romans, which had been another of Padway's ideas. But he had an unhappy, hang-dog air that made Padway suspect that that wasn't the real reason.

To Padway's leading questions he finally burst out: "Excellent Martinus, you'll simply have to give me a command somewhere away from Ravenna. I can't stand it any longer."

Padway put his arm around Urias' shoulders. "Come on, old man, tell me what is bothering you. Maybe I can help."

Urias looked at the ground. "Uh . . . well . . . Look here, just what *is* the arrangement between you and Mathaswentha?"

"I thought that was it. You've been seeing her, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have. And if you send me back there, I shall see her some more in spite of myself. Are you and she betrothed, or what?"

"I did have some such idea once." Padway put on the air of one about to make a great sacrifice. "But, my friend, I wouldn't stand in the way of anybody's happiness. I'm sure you're much better suited to her than I. My work keeps me too busy to make a good husband. So if you want to sue for her hand, go to it, with my blessing."

"You *mean* that? I . . . I don't know how to thank you . . . it's the greatest thing you could do for me . . . I'm your friend for life—"

"Don't mention it; I'm glad to help you out. But now that you're down here, you might as well finish the job you came to do."

"Oh," said Urias soberly. "I suppose I ought to, at that. But how shall I press my suit, then?"

"Write her." Padway got out writing materials.

Padway's original idea had been to introduce a mild form of selective conscription, beginning with the city of Rome and requiring the draftees to report for weekly drill. The Senate, which at this time was a mere municipal council, balked. Some of them disliked or distrusted Padway. Some wanted to be bribed.

Padway did not want to give in to them until he had tried everything else. He had Urias announce drills on a voluntary basis, at current wages. Results were disappointing.

Padway's thoughts were abruptly snatched from the remilitarization of the Italians when Junianus came in with a telegraph message.

It read simply:

WITTIGIS ESCAPED FROM DETENTION LAST NIGHT. NO TRACE OF HIM HAS BEEN FOUND.

(SIGNED)
ATURPAD THE PERSIAN,
COMMANDING

For a minute Padway simply stared at the message. Then he jumped up and yelled: "Fritharik! Get our horses!"

They clattered over to Urias' headquarters. Urias looked grave. "This puts me in an awkward position, Martinus. My uncle will undoubtedly try to regain his crown. He's a stubborn man, you know."

"I know. But you realize how important it is to keep things going the way they are."

"*Ja.* I won't go back on you. But you couldn't expect me to try to harm my uncle. I like him, even if he is a thick-headed old grouch."

"You stick with me and I promise you I'll do my best to see that he isn't harmed. But just now I'm concerned with keeping him from harming *us.* What do you think Wittigis will do?"

"If it were me, I'd hide out for a while and gather my partisans. That would be logical. But my uncle never was very logical. And he hates Thiudahad. My guess is that he'll head straight for Ravenna and try to do Thiudahad in personally."

"All right, then, we'll collect some fast cavalry and head that way ourselves."

Padway thought he was pretty well hardened to long-distance riding. But it was all he could do to stand the pace that Urias set. When they reached Ravenna in the early morning, he was reeling, red-eyed, in the saddle.

They asked no questions, but galloped straight for the palace. The town seemed normal enough. Most of the citizens were at breakfast. But at the palace the normal guard was not to be seen.

"That looks bad," said Urias. They and their men dismounted, drew their swords, and marched in six abreast. They tramped on through the empty halls. Doors shut before they came to them. Padway wondered if they were walking into a trap. He sent back a squad to hold the front door.

At the entrance to the royal apartments, they found a clump of guards. A couple of these brought their spears up, but the rest simply stood uncertainly. Padway said calmly, "Stand back, boys," and went in.

There were several people standing around a body on the floor. Padway asked them to stand aside, which they did meekly. The body was that of Wittigis. His tunic was ripped by a dozen sword and spear wounds. The rug under him was sopping.

The chief usher looked amazedly at Padway. "This just happened, my lord. Yet you have come all the way from Rome because of it. How did you know?"

"I have ways," said Padway. "How did it happen?"

"Wittigis was let into the palace by a guard friendly to him. He would have killed our noble king, but he was seen, and other guards hurried to the rescue. The guards killed him."

A sound from the corner made Padway look up. Thiudahad's ashy face peered at Padway.

"Dear me, it's my new prefect, isn't it? Your name is Cassiodorus. But how much younger you look, my dear sir. Ah, me, we'll grow old sometime. Heh-heh. Let's publish a book, my dear Cassiodorus, three hundred pages at least. By the way, have you seen that rascally general of mine, Wittigis? I heard he was coming to call. Dreadful bore; no scholar at all."

Padway told the king's house physician: "Take care of him, and don't let him out. Somebody take charge of the body. Replace this rug and make the preparations for a dignified but modest funeral."

CHAPTER XV

The members of the Gothic Royal Council appeared in Padway's office with a variety of scowls. They were men of substance and leisure, and did not like being dragged away from their breakfast tables, especially by a mere civil functionary.

Padway acquainted them with the circumstances. His news shocked them to temporary silence. He continued: "As you know, my lords, under the constitution of the Gothic nation, an insane king must

be replaced as soon as possible. Permit me to suggest that present circumstances make the replacement of the unfortunate Thiudahad an urgent matter."

Wakkis growled: "That's *your* doing, young man. We could have bought off the Franks—"

"Yes, my lord. I know all that. The trouble is that the Franks won't stay bought, as you very well know."

Wakkis replied: "We shall have to call another convention of the electors, I suppose."

Just then Urias came in. Padway took him aside and whispered: "What did she say?"

"She says she will."

"When?"

"Oh, in about ten days, I think. It doesn't look very nice so soon after my uncle's death."

"Never mind that. It's now or never."

Manufrith asked: "Who shall the candidates be? I'd like to run myself, only my rheumatism has been bothering me so."

Somebody said: "Thiudegiskel will be one. He's Thiudahad's logical successor."

Padway said: "I think you'll be pleased to hear that our esteemed General Urias will be a candidate."

"What?" cried Wakkis. "He's a fine young man, I admit, but he's ineligible. He's not an Amaling."

Padway broke into a triumphant grin. "Not now, my lords, but he will be by the time the election is called." The Goths looked startled. "And, my lords, I hope you'll all give us the pleasure of your company at the wedding."

During the wedding rehearsal, Mathaswentha got Padway aside. She said: "Really, Martinus, you've been most noble about this. I hope you won't grieve too much."

Padway tried his best to look noble. "My dear, your happiness is mine. And if you love this young man, I think you're doing just the right thing."

"I *do* love him," replied Mathaswentha. "Promise me you won't sit around and mope, but will go out and find some nice girl who is suited to you."

Padway sighed convincingly. "It'll be hard to forget, my dear.

But since you ask it, I'll promise. Now, now, don't cry. What will Urias think? You want to make *him* happy, don't you? There, that's a sensible girl."

The wedding itself was quite a gorgeous affair in a semi-barbaric way. Padway introduced a wrinkle he'd seen in pictures of United States Military Academy weddings: that of having Urias' friends make an arch of swords under which the bride and groom walked on their way down the church steps.

Padway had every intention of keeping Urias under his influence. It seemed possible. Urias was impatient with matters of civil administration. He was a competent soldier, and at the same time was receptive to Padway's ideas. Padway thought somberly that if anything happened to *this* king, he'd hunt a long time before finding another as satisfactory.

He had the news of the impending election sent out over the telegraph, thereby convincing some of the Goths of the value of his contraptions. Padway also sent out another message, ordering all the higher military commanders to remain at their posts. He sold Urias the idea by arguing military necessity. His real reason was a determination to keep Thiudegiskel in Calabria during the election. Knowing Urias, he didn't dare explain this plan to him, for fear Urias would have an attack of knightly honor and, as ranking general, countermand the order.

The Goths had never seen an election conducted on time-honored American principles. Padway showed them. The electors arrived in Florence to find the town covered with enormous banners and posters reading:

VOTE FOR URIAS, THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE!
Lower taxes! Bigger public works! Security for the aged! Efficient government!

Three days before the election, Padway held a barbecue. While he kept modestly in the background, Urias made a speech. Padway later heard comments to the effect that nobody had known Urias could make such good speeches. He grinned to himself. He had

written the speech and had spent all his evenings for a week teaching Urias to deliver it.

Padway and Urias relaxed afterward over a bottle of brandy. Padway said that the election looked like a pushover. Of the two opposing candidates, one had withdrawn, and the other, Harjis Austrowald's son, was an elderly man with only the remotest connection with the Amal family.

Then one of the ward-heelers came in breathless. The man barked: "Thiudegiskel's here!"

Padway wasted no time. He found where Thiudegiskel was staying, rounded up a few Gothic soldiers, and set out to arrest the young man. He found that Thiudegiskel had, with a gang of his own friends, taken over one of the better inns in town, pitching the previous guests and their belongings out in the street.

The gang were gorging themselves downstairs in plain sight. They hadn't yet changed their traveling clothes, and they looked tired but tough. Padway marched in. Thieudegiskel looked up. "Oh, it's *you* again. What do you want?"

Padway announced: "I have a warrant for your arrest on grounds of insubordination and deserting your post, signed by Ur—"

The high-pitched voice interrupted: "You thought I'd stay away from Florence while you ran off an election without me, eh? But I'm a candidate, and anything you try now I'll remember when I'm king. That's one thing about me; I've got an infernally long memory."

Padway turned to his soldiers. "Arrest him!"

The oldest of them, a kind of sergeant, cleared his throat. "Well, sir, we know you're our superior and all that. But we don't know whom we'll be taking orders from in a couple of days. Suppose we arrest this young man and then he gets elected king? That wouldn't be so good for us, now would it, sir?"

"Why—you—" raged Padway.

But the only effect was that the soldiers began to slide out the door. Padway realized that he'd better go too, if he didn't want these well-born thugs to make hamburger of him. He went, full of rage and humiliation.

By the time he finished cursing his own stupidity and thought to round up his eastern troops—the few who weren't up north with

Belisarius—and make a second attempt, it was too late. Thiudegiskel had collected a large crowd of partisans in and around the hotel, and it would take a battle to dislodge them. The ex-Imperialists seemed far from enthusiastic over the prospect, and Urias muttered something about its being only honorable to let the late king's son have a fair try for the crown.

The day before the election, Thiudegiskel showed his political astuteness by throwing a barbecue even bigger than Padway's.

Padway and Urias and Thomasus, who had come from Rome, with the former's ward-heelers, the latter's family, and a sizable guard, arrived at the field outside Florence after the festivities had begun. The field was covered with thousands of Goths of all ages, sizes and sexes, and was noisy with East-German gutturals, the clank of scabbards and the *flop-flop* of leather pants.

Padway's party made themselves comfortable across the road, ignoring the hostile glares from Thiudegiskel's partisans. Padway himself sprawled on the grass, eating little and watching the barbecue through narrowed eyes.

Thomasus said: "Most excellent General Urias, that look tells me our friend Martinus is planning something particularly hellish."

Thiudegiskel and some of his gang mounted the speakers' stand. Willimer introduced the candidate with commendable brevity. Then Thiudegiskel began to speak. Padway hushed his own party and strained his ears. Thiudegiskel appeared to be bragging as usual about his own wonderful character. But, to Padway's consternation, his audience ate it up. And they howled with laughter at the speaker's rough and ready humor.

"—and did you know, friends, that General Urias was twelve years old before his poor mother could train him not to wet his bed? It's a fact. That's one thing about me; I never exaggerate. Of course you *couldn't* exaggerate Urias' peculiarities. For instance, the first time he called on a girl—"

Urias was seldom angry, but Padway could see the young general was rapidly approaching incandescense. He'd have to think of something quickly or there *would* be a battle.

His eye fell on Martinus' slave Ajax and Ajax's family. The slave's eldest child was a chocolate-colored, frizzy-haired boy of ten named Priam.

Padway asked: "Does anybody know whether Thiudegiskel's married?"

"Yes," replied Urias. "The swine was married just before he left for Calabria. Nice girl, too; a cousin of Willimer."

"*Hm-m-m.* Say, Ajax, does that oldest boy of yours speak any Gothic?"

"Why, no, my lord, why should he?"

"Priam, would you like to earn a couple of sesterces, all your own?"

The boy jumped up and bowed. Padway found such a servile gesture in a child vaguely repulsive. Must do something about slavery some day, he thought. "Yes, my lord," squeaked the boy.

"Can you say the word '*atta*'? That's Gothic for 'father.' "

Priam dutifully said: "*Atta.* Now where are my sesterces, my lord?"

"Not so fast, Priam. You see the man in the red cloak on the stand, the one who is talking? Well, you're to go over there and climb up on the stand and say '*atta*' to him. Loudly, so everybody can hear. Say it a lot of times, until something happens. Then you run back here."

Priam frowned in concentration. "But the man isn't my father! This is my father!" He pointed to Ajax.

"I know. But you do as I say if you want your money."

So Priam trailed off through the crowd of Goths and appeared on the stand. Padway clearly heard the childish cry of "*Atta!*"

Thiudegiskel stopped in the middle of a sentence. Priam repeated: "*Atta! Atta!*"

"He seems to know you!" shouted a voice down front.

Thiudegiskel stood silent, scowling and turning red. A low mutter of laughter ran through the Goths and swelled to a roar.

Priam called "*Atta!*" once more, louder.

Thiudegiskel grabbed his sword hilt and started for the boy. Padway's heart missed a beat.

But Priam leaped off the stand and through the crowd, leaving Thiudegiskel to shout and wave his sword. He was yelling, "It's a lie!" over and over. Padway could see his mouth move, but his words were lost in the thunder of the Gothic nation's Wagnerian laughter.

"Hey, my lord," squealed Priam, "where's my two sesterces? Oh, thank you, my lord. Do you want me to call anybody else 'father,' my lord?"

CHAPTER XVI

Padway told Urias: "It looks like a sure thing now. Thiudegiskel will never live this afternoon's episode down."

"Look here, if anybody investigates, they'll learn that Thiudegiskel was the innocent victim of a joke this afternoon. Then won't the effect be lost?"

"No, my dear Urias, that's not how the minds of electors work. Even if he's proved innocent, he's been made such an utter fool of that nobody will take him seriously, regardless of his personal merits, if any."

Just then a ward-heeler came in breathless. He gasped: "Thiu-Thiudegiskel—"

Roderik finally got it out. "Thiudegiskel has left Florence, distinguished Martinus. Nobody knows whither. Willimer and some of his other friends went with him."

Padway immediately sent out over the telegraph Urias' order depriving Thiudegiskel of his rank. Then he sat and stewed and waited for news.

It came the next morning during the voting. But it did not concern Thiudegiskel. It was that a large Imperialist army had crossed over from Sicily and landed, not at Scylla on the toe of the Italian boot where one would expect, but up the coast of Bruttium at Vibo.

Padway told Urias immediately and urged: "Don't say anything for a few hours. This election is in the bag and we don't want to disturb it."

But rumors began to circulate. By the time Urias' election by a two-to-one majority was announced, the Goths were staging an impromptu demonstration in the streets of Florence, demanding to be led against the invader.

Then more details came in. The Imperialist army was commanded

by Bloody John and numbered a good fifty thousand men. Evidently Justinian, furious about Padway's letter, had been shipping adequate force into Sicily in relays.

Padway saw Urias off in Rome with many misgivings. The army looked impressive, surely, with its new corps of horse archers and its batteries of mobile catapults. But Padway knew that the new units were inexperienced in their novel ways of fighting, and that the organization was likely to prove brittle in practice.

Once Urias and the army had left, there was no more point in worrying. Padway resumed his experiments with gunpowder. Perhaps he should try charcoal from different woods. But this meant time, a commodity of which Padway had precious little. He soon learned that he had none at all.

By piecing together the contradictory information that came in by telegraph, Padway figured out that Thiudegiskel had reached his force in Calabria without interference. He had refused to recognize the telegraphic order depriving him of his command and had talked his men into doing likewise.

Bloody John had moved cautiously; he had only reached Consentia when Urias arrived to face him. But while Urias and Bloody John sparred for openings along the river Crathis, Thiudegiskel arrived in Urias' rear—on the Imperialist side. Though he had only five thousand lancers, their unexpected charge broke the main Gothic army's morale. In fifteen minutes the Crathis Valley was full of thousands of Goths—lancers, horse archers, foot archers, and pikemen—streaming off in every direction. Thousands were ridden down by Bloody John's cuirassiers and the large force of Gepid and Lombard on horse he had with him. Other thousands surrendered. The rest ran off into the hills, where the rapidly gathering dusk hid them.

Urias managed to hold his lifeguard regiment together, and attacked Thiudegikel's force of deserters. The story was that Urias had personally killed Thiudegiskel. Padway, knowing the fondness of soldiers for myths of this sort, had his doubts. But it was agreed that Thiudegiskel had been killed, and that Urias and his men had disappeared into the Imperial host in one final, charge, and had been seen no more by those on the Gothic side who escaped from the field.

For hours Padway sat at his desk, staring at the pile of telegraph messages and at a large and painfully inaccurate map of Italy.

Junianus put his head in the door. "Some more messages, my lord."

"What are they?"

"Bloody John is halfway to Salerno. The natives are welcoming him. Belisarius reports he has defeated a large force of Franks."

"Come here, Junianus. You're a native of Lucania, aren't you?"

"Yes, my lord."

"You were a serf, weren't you?"

"Well . . . uh . . . my lord . . . you see—" The husky young man suddenly looked fearful.

"When the messages speak of the 'natives' welcoming the Imperialists, doesn't that mean the Italian landlords more than anybody else?"

"Yes, my lord. The serfs don't care one way or the other."

"If they were offered their holdings as free proprietors, with no landlords to worry about, do you think they'd fight for that?"

"Why"—Junianus took a deep breath—"I think they would."

"That's what I thought," said Padway. "Here are some messages to send out. The first is an edict, issued by me in Urias' name, emancipating the serfs of Bruttium, Lucania, Calabria, Apulia, Campania and Samnium. The second is an order to General Belisarius to leave screening force in Provence to fight a delaying action in case the Franks attack again and return south with his main body at once. Oh, Fritharik! Will you get Gudareths for me? And I want to see the foreman of the printshop."

When Gudareths arrived, Padway explained his plans to him. The little Gothic officer whistled. "My, son, this *is* a desperate measure, respectable Martinus. I'm not sure the Royal Council will approve. If you free all these low-born peasants, how shall we get them back into serfdom again?"

"We won't," snapped Padway. "As for the Royal Council, most of them were with Urias."

"But, Martinus, you can't make a fighting force out of them in a week or two."

"I don't expect to lick Bloody John with raw recruits. But we can give him a hostile country to advance through. You tend to those

pikes and dig up some more retired officers."

Padway got his army together and set out from Rome on a bright spring morning. It was not much of an army to look at: elderly Goths who had supposed themselves retired from active service and young sprigs whose voice had not finished changing.

As they cluttered down Patrician Street from the Pretorian Camp, Padway told his staff to keep on; he'd catch up with them. And off he cantered up the Suburban Slope toward the Esquiline.

Dorothea came out of Anicius' house. "Martinus!" she cried. "Are you off somewhere again?"

"That's right."

"You haven't paid us a real call in months! Every time I see you, you have only a minute before you must jump on your horse and gallop off somewhere."

Padway made a helpless gesture. "It'll be different when I've retired from all this damned war and politics."

"Will you be in the fighting?"

"Probably."

"Oh, Martinus. Wait just a moment." She ran into the house and returned with a little leather bag on a loop of string. "This will keep you safe if anything will."

"What is it?"

"A fragment of St. Polycarp's skull."

Padway's eyebrows went up. "Do you believe in its effectiveness?"

"Oh, certainly. My mother paid enough for it, there's no doubt that it's genuine. She slipped the loop over his head and tucked the bag through the neck opening in his cloak.

"Thank you, Dorothea, from the bottom of my heart. But there's something that I think will be a more effective charm yet."

"What?"

"This." He kissed her mouth and then threw himself aboard his horse. Dorothea stood with a surprised but not displeased look. Padway swung the animal around and sent it back down the avenue.

CHAPTER XVII

It was the latter part of May, 537, when Padway entered Benevento with his army. Little by little the force had grown as the remnants of Urias' army trickled north.

Instead of coming straight down the Tyrrhenian or western coast to Naples, Padway had marched across Italy to the Adriatic, and had come down that coast to Teate. Then he had cut inland to Lucera and Benevento. As there was no telegraph line yet on the east coast, Padway kept in touch with Bloody John's movements by sending messengers across the Apennines to the telegraph stations that were still out of the enemy's hands. He timed his movements to reach Benevento after John had captured Salerno on the other side of the peninsula, had left a detachment masking Naples, and had started for Rome by the Latin Way.

Padway hoped to come down on his rear in the neighborhood of Capua, while Belisarius, if he got his orders straight, would come directly from Rome and attack the Imperialists in front.

Somewhere between Padway and the Adriatic was Gudareths, profanely shepherding a train of wagons full of pikes and handbills bearing Padway's emancipation proclamation. The news of the emancipation had spread like a gasoline fire. The peasants had risen all over southern Italy.

Padway, when he rode back to the rear of his column and watched this great disorderly rabble swarming along the road, chattering like magpies and taking time out to snooze when they felt like it, wondered how much of an asset they would be. Here and there one wore great-grandfather's legionary helmet and loricated cuirass, which had been hanging on the wall of his cottage for most of a century.

Benevento is on a small hill at the confluence of the Calore and Sabbato Rivers. As they plodded into the town, Padway saw several Goths sitting against one of the houses. One of these looked familiar. Padway rode up to him, and cried: "Dagalaif!"

The marshal looked up. "*Hails*," he said in a toneless, weary voice. There was a bandage around his head, stained with black blood where his left ear should have been. "We heard you were coming this way, so we waited."

"Where's Nevitta?"

"My father is dead."

"What? Oh." Padway was silent for seconds. Then he said: "He was one of the few real friends I had."

"I know. He died like a true Goth."

Padway sighed and went about his business of getting his force settled.

They lay in Benevento for a day. Padway learned that Bloody John had almost passed the road junction at Calatia on his way north. There was no news from Belisarius, so the best Padway could hope for was to fight a delaying action and hold John in southern Italy until more forces arrived.

Padway left his infantry in Benevento and rode down to Calatia with his cavalry. By this time he had a fairly respectable force of mounted archers. They were not as good as the Imperialist cuirassiers, but they would have to do.

Fritharik, riding beside him, said: "Aren't the flowers pretty, excellent boss? They remind me of the gardens in my beautiful estate in Carthage. Ah, that was something to see—"

Padway turned a haggard face. He could still grin, though it hurt. "Getting poetical, Fritharik?"

"*Me* a poet? *Honh!* Just because I like to have some pleasant memories for my last earthly ride—"

"What do you mean, your last?"

"I mean my last and you can't tell me anything different. Bloody John outnumbers us three to one, they say. It won't be a nameless grave for us, because they won't bother to bury us. Last night I had a prophetic dream . . ."

As they approached Calatia, where Trajan's Way athwart Italy joined the Latin Way from Salerno to Rome, their scouts reported that the tail of Bloody John's army had just pulled out of town. Padway snapped his orders. A squadron of lancers trotted out in front and a force of mounted archers followed them. They disappeared down the road. Padway rode up to the top of a knoll to watch them.

There was shouting and clattering, tiny with distance, like a battle between gnats and mosquitoes. Faint columns of smoke began to rise over the olive trees. Good; that meant his men had set fire to

Bloody John's wagon train. His first worry had been that they'd insist on plundering it in spite of orders.

The advance guard appeared, riding hard. They were grinning and some waved bits of forbidden plunder. They clattered down the road between the waiting bowmen.

Their commander rode up to Padway. "Worked like a charm!" he shouted. "We came down on their wagons, chased off the wagon guards and set them on fire. Then John himself came down on us with his whole damned army. So we cleared out. They'll be along any minute."

"Fine," replied Padway. "You know your orders. Wait for us at Mt. Tifata pass."

So they departed, and Padway waited. But not for long. A column of Imperial cuirassiers appeared, and their hoofs made a great pounding on the stone-paved road. Their commander, in gilded armor, saw what he was coming to and gave an order. Lances were slung over shoulders and bows were strung.

The Goths opened fire. The commander's horse, a splendid white animal, reared up and was bowled over by another horse that charged into it. The head of the Imperialist column crumpled up into a mass of milling horses and men.

Padway looked at the commander of his body of lancers, swung his arm around his head twice and pointed at the Imperialists. The line of horse archers opened up and the Gothic knights charged through. Back went the cuirassiers with a great clatter, defending themselves desperately at close quarters.

Out of the corner of his eye, Padway saw a group of horsemen ride over a nearby hilltop. He had his trumpeter signal the retreat.

An arrow went by Padway uncomfortably close. He caught up with his Goths, dragged their commander out of the press by main force, and shouted in his ear that it was time to withdraw.

The man yelled back at him: "*Ni! Nist!* Good fighting!" and tore out of Padway's grip to plunge back in.

The Goths now began to stream back down the road. In a few seconds they were all galloping off except a few surrounded by the Imperialists. In theory, it was a strategic retreat. But from the look of the Gothic knights, Padway wondered if it would be possible to stop them this side of the Alps.

Padway sighted a man on foot, bareheaded but gaudy in gilded armor. It was the commander of the Imperialist column. Padway rode at him. The man started to run. Padway leaned over and grabbed a fistful of hair. The man yelled and came along in great jumps.

A glance back showed that the Imperialists had disposed of the Goths who had not been able to extricate themselves, and were getting their pursuit under way.

Padway handed his prisoner over to a Goth. The Goth leaned and pulled the Imperialist officer up over his pommel, face down, so that half of him hung on each side. Padway saw him ride off, happily spanking the unfortunate Byzantine with the flat of his sword.

According to the plan, the horse archers fell in behind the lancers and galloped after them, the rearmost ones shooting backward.

It was nine miles to the pass, most of it uphill. Padway hoped never to have such a ride again. By the time they were within sight of the pass, the horses of both the pursued and the pursuers were so blown that some men had even dismounted to lead their horses.

The bluffs were yellow in a late afternoon sun when the Gothic column finally stumbled through the pass. They had lost few men, but any really vigorous pursuer could have ridden them down and rolled them out of their saddles with ease. Fortunately the Imperialists were just about as tired.

Padway looked around, and saw with satisfaction that the force he had sent ahead were waiting quietly in their places. The Imperialist column clattered echoing into the narrowest part of the pass, the slanting rays of the sun shooting after them.

Then there was a great thumping roar as boulders and tree trunks came bounding down the slopes. Padway signaled a squadron of lancers to charge.

There was room for only six horses abreast and now the Gothic knights struck the fragment that had passed the point of the break. The cuirassiers, unable to maneuver or even to use their bows, were jammed back against the barrier by their heavier opponents. The fight ended when the surviving Imperialists slid off their horses and scrambled back to safety on foot. The Goths rounded up the abandoned horses and led them back whooping.

Bloody John sent a small group of cuirassiers forward to lay down

a barrage of arrows. Padway moved some dismounted Gothic archers into the pass. These, shooting from behind the barrier, caused the Imperialists so much trouble that the cuirassiers were soon withdrawn.

Bloody John now sent some Lombard lancers forward to sweep the archers out of the way. But the barrier stopped their charge dead. While they were picking their way among the boulders, the Goths filled them full of arrows at close range.

Bloody John dismounted some Lombards and Gepids and sent them forward on foot. Padway meanwhile had moved some dismounted lancers up behind the barrier, so that their spears made a thick cluster. The archers moved back and up the walls to shoot over the knight's heads.

The attackers poured howling over the barrier and began hacking at the edge of spears which were too close together to slip between easily. The archers shot and shot. Arrows bounced off helmets and stuck quivering in big wooden shields. Men who were pierced could neither fall nor withdraw.

An archer skipped back among the rocks to get more arrows. Gothic heads turned to look at him. A couple more archers followed, though the quivers of these had not been emptied. Some of the rearmost knights started to follow them.

Padway saw a rout in the making. He grabbed one man and took his sword away. Then he climbed up to the rock vacated by the first archer, yelling something unclear even to himself. The men turned their eyes on him.

The sword was a huge one. Padway gripped it in both hands, hoisted over his head, and swung. He hit at helmets and shields and bare heads and arms and shoulders.

Then there were no heads but Gothic ones within reach. The Imperialists were crawling back over the barrier, lugging wounded men with blood-soaked clothes and arrows sticking in them.

Fritharik and his orderly Tirdat and others were clustering around Padway, telling him what a demon fighter he was. He couldn't see it; all he had done was climb up on a rock, reach over the heads of a couple of his own men and take a few swipes at an enemy who could not hit back. There had been no more science to it than to using a pickax.

The sun had set and Bloody John's army retired down the valley to set up its tents and cook its supper. Padway's Goths did likewise. The smell of cooking-fires drifted up and down pleasantly. Anybody would have thought that here were two gangs of pleasure-seeking campers, but for the pile of dead men and horses at the barrier.

Padway had no time for introspection. There were injured men, and he had no confidence in their ability to give themselves first aid. He raised no objections to their prayers and charms and potations of dust from a saint's tomb stirred in water. But he saw to it that bandages were boiled—which of course was a bit of the magic of Mysterious Martinus—and applied rationally.

Padway, not underestimating his opponent, threw out a very wide and close-meshed system of outposts. He was justified; an hour before dawn his sentries began to drift in. Bloody John, it transpired, was working two large bodies of Anatolian foot-archers over the hills on either side of them. Padway saw that his position would soon be untenable. So his Goths, yawning and grumbling, were routed of their blankets and started for Benevento.

When the sun came up and he had a good look at his men, Padway became seriously concerned for their morale. They did not understand strategic retreats. Padway wondered how long it would be before they began to run away in real earnest.

At Benevento, there was only one bridge over the Sabbato, a fairly swift stream. Padway thought he could hold this bridge for some time, and that Bloody John would be forced to attack him because the loss of his provisions and the hostility of the peasantry.

When they came out on the plain around the confluence of the two little rivers, Padway found a horrifying surprise. A swarm of his peasant recruits was crossing the bridge toward him. Several thousand had already crossed. He had to be able to get his own force over the bridge quickly, and he knew what would happen if that bottleneck became jammed with retreating troops.

Gudareths rode out to meet him. "I followed your orders!" he shouted. "I tried to hold them back. But they got the idea they could lick the Greeks themselves, and started out regardless. I told you they were no good!"

Padway looked back. The Imperialists were in plain sight, and

as he watched they began to deploy. It looked like the end of the adventure.

The Italian serfs had meanwhile seen the Gothic cavalry galloping up with the Imperialists in pursuit, and had formed their own idea that the battle was lost. Soon the road up to the town was white with running Italians. Those who had crossed the bridge were jammed together in a clawing mob trying to get back over.

Padway yelled in a cracked voice, to Gudareths: "Get back over the river somehow! Send mounted men out on the roads to stop the runaways! Let those on this side get back over. I'll try to hold the Greeks here."

He dismounted most of his troops. He arranged the lancers six deep in a semicircle in front of the bridgehead, around the caterwauling peasants, with lances outward. Along the river bank he posted the archers in two bodies, one on each flank, and beyond them his remaining lancers, mounted. If anything would hold Bloody John, that would.

On came the Imperialists. They looked as though they could ride over any body of men on earth. Then the bowstrings began to snap. Here a horse reared or buckled; there a man fell off with a musical clash of scale-mail. But they came on. To Padway they looked twenty feet tall. And then they were right on the line of spears. Padway could see the spearmen's tight lips and white faces. If they held—

They did. The Imperialist horses reared, screaming, when the lancers pricked them. Some of them stopped so suddenly that their riders were pitched out of the saddle. And then the whole mass was streaming off to right and left, and back to the main army.

Padway drew his first real breath in almost a minute. He'd been lecturing his men to the effect that no cavalry could break a really solid line of spearmen, but he hadn't believed it himself until now.

Then an awful thing happened. A lot of his lancers, seeing the Imperialists in flight, broke away from the line and started after their foes on foot. Padway screeched at them to come back, but they kept on trotting heavily in their armor. The alert John sent a regiment of cuirassiers out after the clumsily running mob of Goths, and in a twinkling the Goths were scattering all over the field. Padway raved with fury and chagrin; this was his first serious loss.

He grabbed Tirdat by the collar. "Find Gudareths! Tell him to

round up a few hundred of these Italians! I'm going to put them in the line!"

Padway's line was now perilously thin and he couldn't contract it without isolating his archers and horsemen. But this time John hurled his cavalry against the flanking archers. The archers dropped back down the river-bank, where the horses couldn't get at them, and Padway's own cavalry charged the Imperialists, driving them off in a dusty chaos of whirling blades.

Presently the peasantry appeared, shepherded along by dirty and profane Gothic officers. The bridge was carpeted with pikes dropped in flight; the recruits were armed with these and put in the front line. Just to encourage them, Padway posted Goths behind them, holding sword points against their kidneys.

Now, if Bloody John would let him alone for a while, he could set about the delicate operation of getting his whole force back across the bridge without exposing any part of it to slaughter.

But Bloody John had no such intention. On came two big bodies of horse, aimed at the flanking Gothic cavalry.

Padway couldn't see what was happening, exactly, between the dust and the ranks of heads and shoulders in the way. But by the diminishing clatter he judged his men were being driven off. Then came some cuirassiers galloping at the archers, forcing them off the top of the bank again. The cuirassiers strung their bows, and for a few seconds Goths and Imperialists twanged arrows at each other. Then the Goths began slipping off up and down the river and swimming across.

Finally, on came the Gepids and Lombards, roaring like lions. This time there wouldn't be any arrow fire to slow them up. Bigger and bigger loomed the onrushing mass of long-haired giants on their huge horses, waving their huge axes.

Padway felt the way a violin string must the moment before it snaps.

There was a violent commotion in his own ranks right in front of him. The backs of the Goths were replaced by the brown faces of the peasants. These had dropped their pikes and clawed their way back through the ranks, sword points or no sword points. Padway kicked like a newt on a hook, wondering when the bare feet of the Italians would be succeeded by the hoofs of the hostile

cavalry. The Italo-Gothic kingdom was done for, and all his work for nothing . . .

The pressure and the pounding let up. A battered Padway untangled himself from those who had tripped over him. His whole line had begun to give away, but then he had been frozen in the act. staring.

"What's happened?" yelled Padway. Nobody answered. There was nothing to be seen in front of them but dust, dust, dust.

Then a man appeared, running on foot. Padway saw that he was a Lombard. The man shouted: "*Armaio!* Mercy!" The Goths exchanged startled glances.

A plumed Imperial cuirassier rode up, shouting in Latin: "*Amicus!*" Then appeared whole companies of Imperialists, horse and foot, German, Slav, Hun, and Anatolian mixed, bawling, "Mercy, friend!" in a score of languages.

A solid group of horsemen with a Gothic standard in their midst rode through the Imperialists. Padway recognized a tall, brown-bearded figure in their midst. He croaked: "Belisarius!"

The Thracian came up, leaned over, and shook hands. "Martinus! I was afraid I'd be too late. We've been riding hard since dawn. We hit them in the rear and that was all there was to it. We've got Bloody John, and your King Urias is safe. What shall we do with all these prisoners? There must be twenty or thirty thousand of them at least."

Padway rocked a little on his feet. "Oh, round them up and put them in a camp or something. I don't really care. I'm going to sleep on my feet in another minute."

CHAPTER XVIII

Back in Rome, Urias said slowly: "Yes, I see your point. Men won't fight for a government they have no stake in. But do you think we can afford to compensate all the loyal landlords whose serfs you propose to free?"

"We'll manage," said Padway. "It'll be over a period of years. And this new tax on slaves will help." Padway did not explain that

he hoped, by gradually boosting the tax on slaves, to make slavery an altogether unprofitable institution. Such an idea would have been too bewilderingly radical for even Urias' flexible mind.

Urias continued: "I don't mind the limitations on the king's power in this new constitution of yours. For myself, that is. I'm a soldier and I'm just as glad to leave civil affairs to others. But I don't know about the Royal Council."

"They'll agree. I've shown them how, without the telegraph, we could never have kept such good track of Bloody John's movements, and without the printing press we could never have roused the serfs so effectively."

"What else is there to be done?"

"We've got to write the kings of the Franks, explaining politely that it's not our fault if the Burgunds prefer our rule to theirs, but that we certainly don't propose to give them back to their Merovings majesties. We've also got to make arrangements with the king of Visgoths for fitting out our ships at Lisbon for their trip to the lands across the Atlantic. He's named you his successor, by the way, so when he dies the east and west Goths will be united again."

"I've got to be off. I'd like to see the draft of your letter to Justinian before you send it."

"I'll have it for you tomorrow, and also the apointment of Thomasus the Syrian as minister of finance for you to sign."

Urias asked: "Are you sure your friend Thomasus is honest?"

"Sure he's honest. You just have to watch him. Give my regards to Mathaswentha. How is she?"

"She's calmed down a lot since all the people she most feared have died or gone mad. We're expecting a little Amaling, you know."

"I didn't know! Congratulations."

"Thanks. When are you going to find a girl, Martinus?"

Padway stretched and grinned. "Oh, just as soon as I catch up on my sleep."

Padway watched Urias go with a twinge of envy. He was at the age when bachelors get wistful about their friends' family life.

Padway wrote:

Urias, King of the Goths and Italians, to his Radiant Clemency Flavius Anicius Justinian, Emperor of the Romans, Greetings.

Now that the army sent by your Serene Highness to Italy, under

John, the nephew of Vitalianus, better known as Bloody John, is no longer an obstacle to our reconciliation, we resume discussion for terms for the honorable termination of the cruel and unprofitable war between us.

The terms proposed in our previous letter stand, with this exception: Our previously asked indemnity of a hundred thousand solidi is doubled, to compensate our citizens for damages caused by Bloody John's invasion.

There remains the question of the disposal of your general, Bloody John. As we do not wish to cause the Empire a serious loss, we shall release the said John on payment of a modest ransom of fifty thousand solidi.

We earnestly urge your Serenity to consider this course favorably. As you know, the Kingdom of Persia is ruled by King Khusrau, a young man of great force and ability. We have reason to believe that Khusrau will soon attempt another invasion of Syria. You will then need the ablest generals you can find.

Further, our slight ability to foresee the future informs us that in about thirty years, there will be born in Arabia a man named Mohammed, who, preaching a heretical religion, will, unless stopped, instigate a great wave of barbarian conquest, subverting the rule both of the Persian Kingdom and the East Roman Empire. We respectfully urge the desirabliity of securing control of the Arabian Peninsula forthwith, that this calamity shall be stopped at the source.

Please accept this warning as evidence of our friendliest sentiments. We await the gracious favor of an early reply.

by MARTINUS PADUEI, Quæstor

Padway leaned back and looked at the letter. There were other things to attend to: the threat of invasion of Noricum by the Bavarians and the offer by the Khan of the Avars of an alliance to exterminate the Bulgarian Huns. The alliance would be courteously refused. The Avars would make no pleasanter neighbors than the Bulgars.

And should he go on with his gunpowder experiments? Padway was not sure that this was desirable. The world had enough means of inflicting death and destruction already. On the other hand, his own interests were tied up with those of the Italo-Gothic State, which must therefore be saved at all costs . . .

To hell with it, though Padway. He swept all the papers into a drawer in his desk, took his hat off the peg, and got his horse. He set out for Anicius' house. How could he expect to cut any ice with Dorothea if he didn't even look her up for days after his return to Rome?

Dorothea came out to meet him. He thought how pretty she was.

Before he could get a word out, she began: "You slimy thing! We befriended you and you ruin us! My poor old father's heart is

broken! And now you've come around to gloat, I suppose!"

"What?"

"Don't pretend you don't know! I know all about that illegal order you issued, freeing the serfs on our estates in Campania. They burned our house and stole the things I've kept since I was a little girl—" She began to weep.

Padway tried to say something sympathetic, but she flared up again. "Get out! I never want to see you again! It'll take a squad of your barbarian soldiers to get you into our house. *Get out!*"

Padway got, slowly and dispiritedly. Girls were okay, and he'd probably fall one of these days. But he had more important things to worry over. His success so far in the business of civilization outweighed any little failures in personal relationships.

His job wasn't over. It never would be—until disease or old age or the dagger of some local enemy ended it. There was so much to do and only a few decades to do it in; compasses and steam engines and microscopes and the writ of habeas corpus.

And if he couldn't—if enough people finally got fed up with the innovations of Mysterious Martinus—well, there was a semaphore telegraph system running the length and breadth of Italy, some day to be replaced by a true electric telegraph, if he could find time for the necessary experiments. There was a public post office about to be set up. There were presses in Florence and Rome and Naples pouring out books and pamphlets and newspapers. Whatever happened to him, these things would go on. They'd become too well rooted to be destroyed by accident.

History had, without question, been changed.

Darkness would not fall.

END

LEST DARKNESS FALL

By L. Sprague de Camp

"Lest Darkness Fall is a masterpiece of humorous, fast-moving, romantic adventure. If you have ever wondered what you'd do in such a predicament, read this tale with relish and belly-laughs."

Martin Padway was a smart enough young man, with a scientific education, but no universal genius. He had the misfortune to be dropped back suddenly into a former time, and a very alarming time at that — sixth-century Rome, when the Goths ruled Italy and civilization in the West was collapsing. To make a living and to try to shore up civilization, Padway undertook to introduce inventions such as gunpowder, clocks and printing. Some worked and some didn't, and the results were dramatic and often hilarious.

Prudently resolving to steer clear of women, war and politics, Padway soon found himself up to his neck in all three. He had to be in order to save that very neck; and every effort to withdraw to his proper sphere of technology merely involved him in more desperate adventures. Never having used a sword in his life, he had to fight a duel to save the life of a worthless king whom he despised but whom he had to preserve in order to use. Then he had to placate a beautiful but bloodthirsty Gothic princess who wanted to marry Martin and poison everybody else. And that led to further complications in his harrassed life, which, likewise, never knew a dull moment.