

fly effectually, should have taken the two horses with them."

"That one, at all events," said the other, "which you are riding, must be instantly harnessed."

"We must mend these traces as best we can."

"Here's another set of traces in the cart itself!" shouted one of the robbers.

"Good!" said the leader. "Some two or three of us must harness our own horses to the vehicle, besides yonder chestnut steed. We can ride them all the same. No man need walk, for 'that'. Now, my master," added he, turning once more to Paulus, "dismount, and give me the key of this chest."

"The key is not in my possession," replied Paulus; "but I can tell you where it is."

"Where, then? and quickly!"

"Please to remember," said Paulus, "that you have obtained possession of that chest by convention, by agreement. We might have made you pay a dear price for it. Therefore, before I tell you where the key is, let my men pass. It was to spare 'them' that I gave up the chest."

"By all the gods!" cried the leader furiously, "they shall never pass till we know where the key is! It would take many strong men hours of hard work to break open this box with crowbars, or cut it with steel saws."

Paulus perceived that Chaerias and the two decurions, followed by the six soldiers, had quietly and swiftly sprung into the copse which still lined the road, and were working their way round to where he rode.

He said, "A good locksmith in Rome would soon make you a key."

"Are you courting a needless death?" roared the other. "I am very likely to let a Roman locksmith see this! Once and for all, where is the key?"

By this time, some of the freebooters, who had ridden after and caught the two stray of horses, and attached two of their own to the wagon, and the two men who had parted with their own had now mounted the leaders. One of them here called out, "Cut him down, if he don't tell us where to find the key. We may have troops upon us before we can take this money to a safe place and divide it."

Paulus made his horse bound a few paces away. Chaerias and his companions sprang into the road, and passing Paulus, who had faced round again toward the robbers, resumed at his command their vigorous slinging run along the high-road in the original direction of the march.

"Listen to me," cried Paulus to the robbers. "Time is more precious to you than you are aware. My men are now safe, and I'll tell you where the key is. But, first, let me advise those of you who drive the wagon to move on with it fast; and, if they can leave some of their comrades behind, they will evidently have more of what is in the box to divide among themselves. On the other hand, any of you who may wish to abandon his share in the box has only to come out here after me, and so lose the brief time of security. If no more than 'three' of you come out at once, some of them will doubtless lose something else besides time; if any greater number come, let them catch me."

Cries of "The key! the key!" interrupted him.

"The key of that chest," he resumed, "is lying as far as I could fling it in the forest on the roadside either to the right or to the left, not fifty miles from Rome. Farewell!"

As he said this in a loud voice, he slowly turned Sejanus, and trotted him in pursuit of his running companions. Some of the robbers believed they could find the key upon his person. A shower of javelins missed him, all of which, except three, missed. One glanced against the back of his helmet; two others stuck in the small rings of a steel shirt. At the same time, the rattle of hoofs behind him warned him that he was pursued. He turned half-round on his saddle-cloths, exclaiming as he increased his pace, "Right! Lose your part in yonder box, which is even now trotting off. Come with me, my masters, and let the others have the chest. Come along!"

They did not mean to take this advice, however much they would have desired to punish him for his trick respecting the key, as well as for his defiant and jeering tone. In spite of momentary anger, the great majority of the freebooters were in excellent humor and the wildest spirits. Their work had been short; their success, as they supposed, perfect; and there was

money enough now in their possession to give them more than the value of twelve hundred pounds sterling each. The great majority of them, in fact, felt literally unable to tear themselves away from the iron box, containing twelve millions of sesterces; and this division of their number, and consequent diminution of their combantant power, were the very objects which Paulus had had in view when separating by so wide an interval his two vehicles. Had it become necessary to defend the one in advance, he felt sanguine and even certain that he should have had only a part of the enemy to resist, and even this part would not long continue an attack which might give their accomplices time to divide the spoil in their absence.

Five men, however, among whom was their leader, had dashed forth from the mass of riders to wreak the anger of the moment upon the scoffer. Paulus, going at an easy canter, his face turned back, saw that they were not coming on abreast, their chief being the best mounted, and the four others straggling after him as if in a race. He pressed Sejanus for about a hundred and fifty yards, and, finding now that there was a sufficient interval between the leading pursuer and his followers, pulled up abruptly, and wheeled round.

"I have no need and no wish," he cried, as his long rapier flashed above his charger's head in a wide lateral sweep from left to right, "to take your life, but you shall carry a marked face to your grave!"

It was not a very violent cut, but measured with great exactness, and delivered with half-force. There was blood on the three-edged sword as it came away. The man yelled. The next pursuer pulled up in haste to let the third join him; and in the meantime Paulus, who had passed the leading robber on that gentleman's right hand, now made a curve across the whole road in returning, and flew by him at full speed on the opposite side, where the poor caitiff would have had to strike or thrust across his own bridle. He made an awkward attempt to do the former, but was, of course, short of his chastiser, who continued his course until he overtook Cassius Chaerias and the others, still running steadily along the road.

Here, looking back, he perceived that his pursuers had given up the chase, and were using their best speed to rejoin the main body, who (some before and some behind the precious van) could be seen travelling away in the distance at a vigorous trot.

"Stop a moment," cried Paulus, dismounting; "take breath now."

And Chaerias, the two decurions, and the soldiers all stopped, and gathered round the young centurion. The four officers burst simultaneously into a hearty laugh, and their mirth rather surprised the grim legionaries, who conceived that to have just lost twelve million sesterces of military pay was no laughing matter.

While Thellus picked out of our hero's shoulders the two javelins still sticking in the steel shirt, he said in a low voice:

"Young master and friend, had you not better ride forward fast? It is not well to leave those weighty corn-bags too long in the charge of common soldiers."

"You are right, my friend. I will do so. Chaerias, I must overtake the other vehicle. Bring all our friends here quickly after me. Fellow-soldiers, you must sustain your severe pace for a few hours or so longer. At every milestone you must change the run to a quick walk until quite in breath again."

And remounting, he galloped forward. It was in a part of the road perfectly level with the land around, under bright starlight, the moon having set, that he came up with the four soldiers who were escorting the baggage-cart. They were halting. The lynch-pin of one of the front wheels had given way, the wheel had wobbled off the axle-tree, and the legionaries were even then busy in endeavoring to manufacture a temporary fastening. In other respects the horses had all fallen lame. To maintain a forced pace was no longer possible. When the wheel had been replaced in a rude fashion, Paulus directed his men to move forward gently at a walk, until they should be re-joined by the nine others belonging to their little expedition; and while riding quietly in their rear, and affecting to hum an air of music which was then popular in Greece, and used to be played by ladies upon the sevenstringed lyre, he considered, with no little anxiety and

carefulness, was it possible that the freebooters should find out the contents of the strong box and return in pursuit?

First, it was certain that they would not go all the way back to Rome; they would not dare to take their cumbersome and conspicuous prize into the city at all. They must already have halted; and it was likely that, making their way off the high-road into the forest, they would have deposited the chest in some safe dell or dingle. Secondly, however, it was not probable they could open the chest by any forcible means for many hours. This thought was a relief. But suddenly an alarming idea occurred to him. Eleazar had betrayed him; would not Eleazar be sufficiently cunning to anticipate—not perhaps the removal of the money out of the chest, but the easy and obvious artifice of concealing the key? The delay which could be caused by the want of a key might enable a well-mounted rider to fetch from the rear-guard of Germanicus's army a strong escort, and to lead it back in time to recover the booty; and "might not Eleazar possess a duplicate key?" Might he not have followed his accomplices, and, meeting them on their return, have produced the means which they desired but lacked of opening the box? Then would a discovery be made which would convince the band that Paulus retained the treasure still; they would remember there was a second wagon; they would follow him again; he had not yet made a hundred miles, and now, with these lame horses, he could no longer fly fast. His difficulties, risks, and responsibilities became so acutely painful to the young man, that he clinched his hands involuntarily and groaned aloud.

After a time, looking back along the road, he saw Chaerias and the others in the distance following swiftly. He turned his horse round, and awaited them. There were some wines and other provisions in the cart, and he determined to call a halt, afford his men the refreshments which their severe exertions had rendered so needful, and consult with his three friends.

Distributing to the legionaries bread, meat, and wine, he ordered them to give the horses a feed of corn in nose-bags, and then to go back along the road, beyond hearing; to keep attentive watch for any sign of pursuit; to take a repast, and to rest until further orders.

When these things had been done, and when the soldiers were out of hearing, our youth and his three companions took their seats upon the corn-bags in the wagon; and while eating some bread and meat and grapes, and passing round a horn of wine, Paulus laid the subject of his anxiety before the others. They agreed with him as to the gravity of the disastrous possibility impending over them; and Longinus, who was very modest, seeing that neither Chaerias nor Thellus proffered a word, said:

"Centurions, we left Rome, you know, by the Via Nomentana; we have made about a hundred thousand paces; we are now not far from the Lake Thrasymene, of evil fame. I know this country well. Not six hundred paces from the road, on the right hand, there is an ancient bosky dingle or hollow. It was, I think, formerly a quarry, from which many thousand paces of this very road were paved. It is now lined all round with copse and brushwood. I recommend that we take the wagon through the fields into that dell, where it will remain concealed completely, as it will be much below the level of the surrounding country. At the brink of the dell we can unharmless the horses, which some of the men can mount and ride off upon. There are provisions enough for three or four days for three of us. We will let the wagon roll down to a ledge in the concave of the dingle. The centurion Chaerias, Thellus, and myself will remain on guard, and lead the forester's life for a day or two or three. You, who are so well mounted, can ride as fast as possible to the camp of Germanicus, near Forum Allieni, and bring back a sufficient escort, say fifty men, and we will await your return."

(To be Continued.)

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