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The Gadiantons

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Abstract: A fictional account of the Gadianton robbers based on the story in the Book of Mormon. Author uses actual characters such as Cezoram, Hagoth, and Seantum.

The Gadiantons.

BY ELIZABETH RACHEL CANNON, AUTHOR OF "THE CITIES OF
THE SUN."

And it came to pass that the Lamanites did hunt the band of robbers of Gadianton; . . . insomuch that this band of robbers was utterly destroyed from among the Lamanites.

I.—At the Fountain.

"Hurry with your trifling, and lend me your cup that I may fill my jars," admonished Abish.

"You're in a hurry today?" queried Sara lazily.

The water in the fountain was low, and it had to be scooped up from the bottom. Sara was trickling the cool liquid over her pink fingers, quite oblivious to her own empty water pitchers standing with gaping mouths on the curb.

The two women, Abish, a servant in the house of Ahah, and Sara, a servant of Seantum, often met at the fountain to gossip. At this time the possible union between the heads of their two houses was an inexhaustible subject; for Seantum, the proud Nephite, was a suitor for the hand of Ahah, a girl of mixed blood. Possible exigencies were suggested by the fact that Ahah was believed to love Hagoth, a Lamanite soldier; on the other hand, her mother, the widowed Miriam, openly encouraged the suit of Seantum.

Truly the plaza in the beautiful suburb, Antionum, was a pleasant place to loiter. The fountain was the life source of the city, and sooner or later everyone came there to drink. The gorgeous flowers of the tropics were so rich that the very bees became intoxicated and produced a honey that was the original

nectar. A long line of Biblical-looking girls, carrying water jars on their heads, extended from the fountain. Alternating with oval, Madonna-like faces, lit with lustrous eyes, was the ardent, gypsy coloring that told of mixed blood, for Lamanites and Nephites mingled freely in the community.

"The servants at our house do not dawdle the day away," announced Abish severely. "Our mistress looks after her household."

Sara felt the implied sneer, for the ancient halls of Seantum languished in bachelor neglect.

"When the fair Ahah comes to preside over *our* household then may I have to *run* home heavy laden."

"If your white-faced master be not so slow that he lets Hagoth, the Lamanite, walk off with her before his eyes. I could tell him things—"

"A Lamanite!" laughed Sara derisively. "Ahah is not particular in her taste. But then the poor girl cannot help it, it is in her blood—"

Sara stopped short, for along the street, ringing with startling distinctness, arose the cry,

"Cezoram, son of Cezoram, the chief judge, is dead!"

For a moment there was absolute stillness, then wild clamor broke forth. Rumor, with her thousand tongues, told that Cezoram, chief judge of all the Nephites, had not risen that morning, and when an attendant went to wake him, he found him lying naturally in his bed—dead. He had been struck upon the head as he slept, by an assassin who had come and gone as stealthily as the night air.

"Who killed him?" inquired Abish, plucking at the arm of a man who passed with broad strides, muttering in his beard.

"Who should it be but the Gadiantons, the terrible robbers, the mention of whose very name blanches the faces of the people and shakes the very government? The Nephite officials are in secret league with them, else we would not be so terrorized. Two chief judges slain within a year! Cezoram, the elder, struck down as he sat upon the judgment seat—his son and successor most foully murdered in his room! Is there no end to our endurance?"

"The Gadiantons!" Bursting with her news, Ahah caught

up her half filled jars and hurried out through some deserted gardens that she might more quickly arrive home. As she picked her way through some overgrown vines, she stopped suddenly. Her eye had caught sight of a familiar crest. Across the open space was the stalwart figure of Hagoth, clothed in tiger skin, his badge of knighthood. By his side, in flaunting red petticoat, walked a Lamanite girl. At the edge of the woods he returned the basket he had been carrying, and the head of the plumed chief bent low over her.

“Hagoth making love to an Indian! I wonder what Ahah will say?”

Later she heard what her mistress had to say, and the servant's tale lost nothing in the telling of it.

II.—In the Home of Miriam.

A party of four sat at the supper board of Miriam. It was spread on the roofed cloisters, midway between the patio where marguerites, like Psyche, flirted with their own fair image in the fountain, and the house, where, through gold embroidered gauze curtains, an occasional glimpse was had of a vast inner apartment set with mosaics.

Before the guests, who sat on mats, were spread tempting dulces (sweets) and heaped up salvers of the strange fruits of the tropics, the butter, eggs and custards that grow on trees.

A servant brought cups of frothing chocolate to the two women—Ahah, whose gold-crowned head rose like an aureole above the sea-foam green of her gown, and her mother, Miriam, massive and handsome despite her years. Shem, an aged traveler from the far south, was scooping out spoonfuls of papaya, a peptonized squash, while Seantum leaned against a marble pillar, his pale face with its weak features peering lividly through clouds of tobacco smoke.

The murder of the morning was under discussion.

“Who are these Gadiantons?” asked Shem. “Methinks it was they who robbed a pack train of a merchant of our town. Though he carried the matter to the tribunal, he could get no restitution.”

“Restitution!” Miriam smiled grimly. “How can we expect

justice when the Nephite officials are in secret league with the robbers?"

"They have been a menace to our nation since our organization," hastily interposed Seantum, anxious to change the subject.

"Indeed!" Shem thoughtfully stroked his long beard, while his Jewish face bent forward with interest.

"The chief judges have been their victims ever since Kishkumen, an unscrupulous adventurer, stabbed Judge Pahoran. The good Helaman would have suffered a like fate had not a servant of his overheard this plot and killed Kishkumen first. The blackguard followers of this professional assassin were organized into a secret society by Gadianton, who introduced Satan's own machinations. After that the bandits fled to the mountains, where they have subsisted ever since."

"Cannot they be apprehended?" asked Shem astonished.

"They hold the mountain fastnesses, and route every army sent against them. Only occasionally do they infest the valleys to drive off the cattle."

"It would be a good thing if they drove off only the cattle," remarked Miriam sharply. "They swooped down upon a village when most of the men were away at the late war, and carried off the women and children."

"The Gadianton robbers are dreadful men." Ahah shuddered. "They brought one who had been taken prisoner to fight upon the sacrificial stone, before Tubaloth, king of the Lamanites. With one foot chained to the rock, and armed only with sword and shield, he fought and vanquished eight warriors. The king granted him his freedom."

"They will surely punish the slayer of Cezoram," suggested Shem.

"Certainly, if they can find him."

"Must a whole nation quail before these bloodthirsty barbarians?" exclaimed Ahah passionately. Remembering that it was whispered that Seantum himself, like many of the officials, was helpless against the banditti, she asked suddenly, "Seantum, why don't you lead an army against them?"

"Impossible!" returned the effeminate youth. "Perhaps our friend, the husky Lamanite, will undertake the task," he added

sneeringly. "They say that Tubaloth's young men are deserting the army to join the robbers. The king has sworn vengeance against them."

"When did the Nephites have to call upon their ancient enemies for help?" interposed Miriam haughtily.

The meal was finished and despite the fuming of Seantum and the open displeasure of her mother, Ahah excused herself on the plea of illness and fled to her room. Although the servants came up and lighted the torches, the light had gone out for the three that remained.

III.—The Rage of Ahah.—Hagoth's Departure.

Ahah threw herself in the hammock on the balcony that her apartment opened on. She was shaken with rage, but the more violent the passion, the sooner does it consume itself. Destruction would have descended on the head of Hagoth had he appeared at that moment; as it was, her anger had just three hours to cool.

The stars hung low in the tropic heavens; a nearby field was illumined with the phosphorescent glow of flitting firelight; below a tree broke into a galaxy of white stars.

As she clenched her small hands until the nails cut the palms, Ahah was not in a mood to contemplate scenery.

"Flirting with a Lamanite frump, indeed! How do I know that Hagoth has not a dozen Indian loves among his own people?"

Hitherto Ahah had been so engrossed by her condescension in loving a mere Lamanite, that the possibility of anyone else loving him had never occurred to her. That Hagoth had been whole-souled in his devotion to her, she admitted. Nothing wins a woman quite so quick as the knowledge that a man has staked his all on her. Else why had she stooped to love him?

Slowly she lived over their acquaintance. All the details were graven on her brain. It had been romantic from the start. The horses of the Lamanite king were running away, dragging the broken chariot behind them. The driver had been hurled out in turning the corner, and Tubaloth himself was reeling, when the careening animals were stopped by the impact of a lithe body hurled full at their heads. The catapult was Hagoth, who there-

after was knighted and received the order of the tiger, a distinction he valued less than the thanks of a mother who caught up her little brown baby that had been playing in the road directly in the way of the runaway. Since then, Ahah's every meeting with Hagoth had tightened the grip on her heart. Yet the thing that made her angriest of all, was that she should care so much.

When a plumed crest of sable hue loomed up above the passion flower of the balcony, she started up as if she had not been waiting long for that apparition.

As Hagoth swung himself easily in front of her, she faced him with the accusation, "You are late."

"I have been watching the lights below for hours. I thought you were there with Seantum."

"Did he stay so long with mother? I left them hours ago—to wait here alone, while you, forsooth, amused yourself with an Indian girl—Ugh!"

"Ahah!"

"I tell you, you were seen walking in the woods with her, whispering to her, carrying her basket, and—they said she was pretty," she finished with a wail.

"It is a mistake. I—"

"A mistake! Look at me!" she cried fiercely. "You, a Lamanite, an associate of laboring wenches, have made me weep—I, Ahah, who do not shed tears once in five years, have wept this night over you!" She laughed bitterly.

"But the girl gave me some information from a relative of hers."

"What could I expect—I who without reason, against the warning of my friends, the opposition of my relatives, have squandered my attention on you!"

"Ahah, you possess the best part of my life; but if I am bringing you such unhappiness—"

That brought her to terms. Then followed one of those exalted moments lit by the white light of spirituality.

"See, Hagoth," she breathed earnestly, "beautiful as this is, I lie awake nights worrying where it will end. I am too much of a coward to flee with you, for I fear to fail in the new life. You

must raise yourself to my station. You have youth, strength, brains, and my faith in you."

"And if I win out?"

"I will marry you."

"I accept the challenge. In forty days I shall return to claim my own."

Ahah looked startled. "How do you propose to do it?"

"Because of what you have promised me this night I shall confide to you my secret, though the success of the venture itself depends on silence. At dawn I take command of a party of Lamanites that goes into the mountains to destroy the Gadiantons."

"Oh!" Ahah reeled, and she felt the world slipping from under her, such terror did the name of the dreadful robbers inspire.

"If I win, any favor within the gift of Tubaloth, king of the Lamanites, is mine."

"If you should fail!"

"If I fail—you will admit I shall have a splendid tomb—the snow-clad summit of Mt. Misti."

Ahah, with a moan, threw up her arms to shut out the torturous vision, for the Gadiantons not only murdered but mangled their victims.

He came closer; his eyes blazed with triumph; his voice was tense with suppressed emotion. "Remember, in forty days you are mine!" And he was gone.

Ahah threw herself against the post. "You shall not go! I tell you I won't let you!" she screamed. In her desperation she almost hurled herself over the balcony, but no answer came. Hagoth had vanished into the night whence he had come. Overwhelmed with remorse for driving him on, steeped in her own misery, she lay where she had fallen until the mocking bird began to sing and the day emerged from the night, like Venus, new-born from the sea.

Rising, she dashed the crumpled bell of the passion flower under her feet, and entering her apartment threw herself on the bed.

When Abish stole softly up to tell her young mistress that he bath water was ready, she found her with all her clothes on

breathing heavily. Throwing a silken shawl over her, she turned and tiptoed out.

IV.—The Triumph of Hagoth.

Ahah lay languidly back in the boat and dabbled her white hand in the water. Seantum opposite, equally lazy, was doing nothing more strenuous than watch the sunlight on her hair of burnished copper. The servant, Abish, knelt in the bottom of the boat trying to bring order out of the chaos of flowers with which the boat was flooded. It was the festival of flowers, and Ahah had insisted on buying some of every kind she saw. As she had selected them for their gaudiness, the effect was picturesque. The boatman, who stood in striped cotton garment, with bare, brown feet and broad-brimmed hat, drove the craft along the sluggish canal by means of a pole.

They were enroute to the floating gardens of Miramar. Conversation languished while they watched the panorama, for the canal was alive with the graceful crafts, as this was a special feast day. There were boats loaded with poppies; others banked with pink rosebuds; more modest symphonies in purple and electric blues—violets and forget-me-nots, like a damozel, left a fragrant trail behind them. They passed cargoes of green vegetables bound for the city, and houseboats which carried not only the family and their household furniture, but the livestock, dogs, chickens and parrots.

Gayest of all were the flat-bottomed boats filled with troubadours. These children of the sun lent the music of their voices to the tinkle of their stringed instruments. Everyone seemed bent on merry-making, and as a lonely heart is never so desolate as when buried in a gay crowd, so Ahah felt more poignant misery by contrast.

Thirty days had elapsed since Hagoth's sudden departure. Since then she had had no word from him, and her veiled inquiries had elicited no news. "He is so bent on his man's enterprise that he would not stop to consider a woman!" she exclaimed petulantly. But her good sense told her it would not be wise for him to send a message. Later she was consumed with a wild fear that he was dead, and during the long hours of the night saw him die twenty

deaths in as many different ways. In the meantime she went calmly about her affairs and continued to endure Seantum, as there was nothing else to do.

They had planned to spend the day in the rustic bowers of a planter at Miramar, but as they wound in and out among the floating gardens, at first nothing but patches of variegated green, it was evident that some unusual occurrence was happening on shore. Market venders had deserted their stalls, and women had left their meat sizzling on the brazeros—open air stoves of clay containing glowing charcoal.

“What’s the matter?” called Seantum to the hoary boatman.

“They say the Gadiantons are destroyed,” he answered.

Ahah was on her feet swaying in the boat. “Who did it?” she cried, as if her life hung on the answer.

“A Lamanite by the name of Hagoth. One of his men stopped off here. He’s over in the square there now.”

Without waiting for the boat to stop, Ahah bounded quickly to the oozy mud of the shore, and was up the bank in a moment. Running swiftly, she reached the excited crowd, and made her way through it. In the center she recognized one of Hagoth’s lieutenants.

“You are going back to Antionum?” she queried breathlessly.

On his answer in the affirmative, she begged eagerly, “Then you will let us take you back in our boat?” as she tossed him a golden seon.

As if he were in his chief’s secret, he gladly accepted the invitation, and Seantum was doomed to hear his rival’s praises sung on the return trip which had begun so auspiciously for him.

While the warrior recited the story of the expedition in his crudest way, Ahah hung on every word.

“When we started, we had to hew our way through the underbrush; higher up it was easier climbing, but the tropical downpour came down in bucketfuls and drenched us to the skin. Underfoot it was so slimy, we slipped back a step for every two we took. The guides lost the trail and we slunk under the trees while they found it. Later we spent the night in a cave. The fire went out, as it was as much as a man’s life was worth to

descend into the barranca for wood. The roof leaked, and we woke up with our heads in a pool of water.

“The next morning the ravines were raging torrents! Advancing under these difficulties, we finally decried above the tree tops the misty expanse of Lake Titicaca. Like all high waters, it is sullen, cold and deep. There on the shores we found the log hut of an old Nephite, whose only daughter had been carried off by the Gadiantons. He has lived there a hermit, vowing vengeance ever since. He offered to act as guide, and lent us his two boats. It took many trips across the lake to get all of our party over. When we reached the bluffs, on the other side, Hagoth’s plans became apparent.

“The reason that the robbers’ rendezvous had never been discovered was because of the impossible ravines that hedge it on all sides. Hagoth proposed to take the shortest route, straight across the summit of Mt. Misti, which towers eighteen thousand feet into the air. So up we climbed into the rarefied atmosphere among the pines and cedars. Occasionally the clouds below us parted like the veil of a Turkish beauty, affording us seductive glimpses of the tropics at reeling distances below. We passed the timber line and trailed across the lava beds, undulating hills of black ashes. Here grew a yellow daisy with frosted leaves; somewhere below the clouds lay the world, but our goal was the snow-clad peak that cut the sky in two.

“The ascent through the snow was bitterly cruel. Some of the men were bleeding at the nose, others had difficulty to breathe, while some, with palpitation of the heart, were crawling on their hands and knees. We were all temporarily blinded by the white light of the sun on the snow.

“At the top we skirted the sulphurous crater for a mile and a half, and on the other side tobogganed down the snow-clad peaks on mats. Then we had to make quick work of it, for provisions that are carried as a man-pack are light.

“Six hundred feet below us in the barranca was the camp of the Gadiantons. A gruesome spectacle they were in the light of the camp fire. Despite the cold, their lean, brown limbs were bare, save where they had decorated them with blood. Their loins were swathed in sheep-skin, and their shaven heads cockaded with

feathers. Altogether we were glad that the depth of the canyon lay between us.

“All night we toiled, loosening the great boulders of the cliff that had been eroded into great blocks. At dawn of the second day we started several of them over the cliff by way of a good morning. They cut great oak trees off from their roots, and crumbled to pieces in the ravines below. They did not do much damage, but they brought the robbers out from their lair. When a side of the mountain crashed down, Zorum, the leader of the band, came out and held up his arms.

“Hagoth descended to parley with him. He left instructions with us to wipe out the band in case he did not return. He offered them their choice of death or surrender. The terms were that they return to civilization and become decent citizens. There was no possible way to escape, as before they could get out the top of the mountain would bury them alive, leaving them all like one of their men who had already been hit by a rolling boulder, and whose remains were but a mangled mass in the gully. They surrendered. They didn't seem to be enjoying themselves much up there in the mountains, anyway. So Hagoth just brought them down with him. Tubaloth has granted them concessions and will try to convert them.”

Seantum, as he heard of the success of his rival, knew that he had lost. By the time the victorious warriors entered the city, Ahah was on her balcony waving her scarf. Amid strains of barbaric music and the huzzas of the populace, she beheld her chief come through the streets in the gilded chariot of the Lamanite king. As he glanced in her direction, Hagoth removed his sable plume and let the sun caress the glossy black head she loved so well. Behind him stalked the Gadianton robbers, frightful apparitions to the awe-struck people. The travel-stained Lamanite soldiers brought up the rear.

During all the feasting that followed, when Hagoth sat on the right-hand of the king, and the great of the nation assembled at the board to hear him lauded and glorified, the chieftain panted for the time when all this tinsel should be over, and he should be alone with a girl and claim his reward.

(THE END.)