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The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARAHEMLA

By E. Heloise Merkley

VIII

Jarom had often to content himself to return to the Gadiantons without seeing Orpah. But he was learning the patience he urged upon Gidgiddoni, and though no days seemed quite worth living when he did not have at least one smile from her, he schooled himself to wait and returned to report to Giddianhi. At the close of his double trip with Gidgiddoni, therefore, he hurried back to the Gadianton stronghold, not daring to remain away too long, lest he miss some important counsel of the Robbers and fail to report it to Gidgiddoni.

"Well, Jarom, how fare our enemies? Are they growing hungry yet?" the Robber Chief demanded of him as soon as he presented himself.

"Not yet, nor for a long time yet, Giddianhi," Jarom replied, "I almost think they could remain as they are for generations without starving," he added, smiling at the laughter this report called forth. Then he proceeded to give them a very vivid description of his trip with Gidgiddoni and what he had seen of the resources of the Nephites and how well they were organized and controlled.

"Methinks this Gidgiddoni is a great magician and has caused you to see visions of things that are not," Giddianhi commented when he had finished.

"Nevertheless, O Chief," Jarom replied, "I warn you once more that by waiting for the Nephites to starve, we shall only starve ourselves and gain nothing. Only in open battle can we gain over them now, since we have allowed them to fortify themselves so well. And the sooner we challenge them to open battle, the greater will

be our hopes of conquering. Thus far they have wasted their strength in getting fortifications built and have not trained their soldiers much. Our men are in the best of trim. Let us then challenge them, and waste no more time doing it."

"I fear, O Jarom, one of two things. Either this Gidgiddoni and his fair daughter have bribed you to urge us on, because they fear to wait, or else your own fears make you impatient. We will not yet challenge the Nephites to open battle, but will prepare ourselves, and when their enormous supplies of food are exhausted will have an easy victory over them. Is this not so, my friends?"

A great shout of approval answered him, and Jarom pretended to be greatly chagrined. "If you think so lightly of my report, O Chief, perhaps you had best send another in my place to get you information," he said sullenly.

"No, we cannot do that, as you know, Jarom," Giddianhi replied, "because you happen to be the only one who has Gidgiddoni for a friend. So we will continue to use your services as a spy. But that does not imply that you are to dictate our policies. Spies are spies and not captains."

Jarom bowed as though greatly humiliated, but his heart was singing within him. For he was sure now that waiting was the thing that was best for the Nephites and worst for the Gadiantons.

So began the long weary game of patience between the Gadiantons and the Nephites. Each waited watchfully until the other should grow weary from lack of food. Jarom made his regular trips back and forth between Zarahemla and the Gadianton strongholds but

they soon became mere forms, because there was seldom any new thing to report.

If he saw Orpah, it seemed to him that his love and longing for her grew stronger because of her beauty and graciousness. If he failed to see her, it seemed to him that his love and longing for her grew stronger because of the disappointment and the unsatisfied hunger gnawing at his heart. And sometimes he told himself that she loved him as he did her. While at other times, seeing the handsome young officers of the army or of the Chief Judges' court who were so frequently at the house of the Chief Captain, the demon of jealousy tore his heart for weeks.

At such times he reproached himself bitterly for ever having kidnapped her and for having been born the son of a Gadianton. Life seemed very dark to Jarom when he sat in his empty home, remembering his mother, and with anguished heart crying out for the lovely girl he was struggling so valiantly to deserve.

One day, when he had for weeks been fighting the jealousy and discouragement that had come with his last trip to Zarahemla, he sought Orpah in her home and found a young man who was obviously a suitor for her hand, just departing. So all the dark thoughts that had been banished by her nearness came flooding him again and Orpah read them in his face.

"What is it, Jarom?" she asked, when they were alone, "Have I done something to hurt you?"

"I don't know whether you have or not," he replied, "but I fear you have."

"Tell me what it is, that I may make it right, if I can, or beg your forgiveness at least, if that is impossible," Orpah suggested gently.

"I dare not," he replied, "because I cannot endure to know for sure that it is so."

"Oh, I am sure it is nothing I have intended to do or say to hurt you, Jarom," she pleaded, "please tell me."

And as if to test the very fiber of his being in the restraint he had vowed to hold himself under until he had fulfilled his great undertaking, she knelt upon the floor beside him, where he sat on a low couch, and laid one smooth white arm across his lap, half circling him with the other.

"Please tell me, Jarom, and don't turn away so coldly," she begged, as he fought the impulse to drop to his knee beside her and smother her with caresses.

"Oh, it is nothing you could help," he answered evasively, "and I have not yet earned the right to protest even if it be true."

"What about my right? Is my friendship for you nothing? Is my promise to you nothing, that you should refuse to give me a chance to justify myself if I have hurt you?"

"Your promise to me? Oh, Orpah, do you still hold to that? Do you have any faith that I can keep my promise to you and so claim yours to me some day?"

"I have as much faith in your ability to do your part as I have in my father's ability to do his part. And so I am sure that some day the Gadiantons will be no more."

"Then you are not in love with that man who just left—nor with any of those who come so often to strive for your love?"

"So that is the trouble?" Orpah guessed, "and you do not trust me? You think that when I told you I loved you, I did not know my own mind, or else that I am possessed of the kind of heart that can change allegiance? Is that it Jarom?"

"Yes, that is it," Jarom confessed, "I feared that you might have forgotten your love for me, because I am so unworthy of it and see you so seldom, and these other men are Nephites who have never been Gadiantons and who have never wronged you."

It was Orpah's turn to draw away from him now and seem disheartened.

"What could you expect, Jarom," she

said reproachfully, "Do you suppose that a girl can go on loving a man forever when he comes only once in a while as a friend and never says a word about his love nor offers a caress of the least familiar nature? Do you think love can feed forever upon itself without any of the tender words and pleadings that—that other men offer so abundantly?"

"Then my fears were right!" Jarom exclaimed, starting to his feet as though to go, "And I have lost all hope of ever winning you?"

Orpah sprang toward him, laughing, but with tears in her eyes, and caught his hand in both hers to pull him back.

"No, no, Jarom! You misunderstand! I love you more and more all the time, but—oh, I am a woman and have no right to say these things, but I am going to say them anyhow—but I am so lonely when you are away, and you come so seldom, and then you never—you never—whisper a word of love, never offer the slightest caress.

Jarom scarcely knew what to do with himself. He wanted to apologize and explain that he had resolved not to make love to her until he had the right. But a sense that her love for him gave him all the right in the world checked the words. He was afraid, too, that if he offered to caress her now she would be still more humiliated in the thought that perhaps he did it only because she had said she hungered for it. But it seemed to him that each one tore a new wound in his weary heart. And gradually, in spite of his promise to himself, in spite of his hesitation, almost without his knowledge, he stepped closer and closer to the trembling form upon the couch. Finally yielding all restraint before the rush of instinctive tenderness that swept him, he dropped beside her, caught the hand that hung limply at her side, and covered it with kisses.

It seemed to him that he never could stop. Then Orpah, laughingly wiping the sobs away, sat up and lifted her

face to him. Very tenderly he put his arms about her, and drawing her gently to him, kissed her lips.

As he released her, Orpah drew back. "That will do, Jarom," she said quietly, "I think you have shown that you are not quite all ice, and perhaps we can wait a while now for any more kisses."

"Oh, this waiting!" Jarom exclaimed, "that is what wears upon body and soul! If only there were a battle to fight or anything to do except wait!"

"Why you are the most active man of them all!" Orpah exclaimed, "It seems to me that you are always on the road between here and the mountains."

"Always on the road, yes, but accomplishing nothing. If only something would happen!"

"I'll tell you, Jarom," Orpah suggested, "We'll pray for a change to end the suspense."

"Yes, that may start something moving," Jarom agreed, "But now it is time I were moving," and with one more tender kiss, he left her to make one more of his interminable trips to the mountains. But now his heart was singing in the joy of Orpah's love.

Nor was the prayer in vain. Already the wild game was becoming so scarce that the Gadiantons were beginning to suffer. The next time he came to Zarahemla he found it necessary to beg Gidgiddoni to have a little substantial food left in a secret spot outside the walls of the city that he might by eating it, keep up his strength so that he should not weaken in his work as a spy.

Still hoping to starve the Nephites within their walls, the Gadiantons now began sallying out of the mountains and going to the deserted Nephite cities to take possession of them. Some of them even attempted to raise crops in the empty fields. But without tools or domestic animals, they could make little headway, and Jarom was not content that they should try their experiment in peace.

Each time that an ambitious colony of Gadiantons became partially settled in some charming village, Jarom would inform Gidgiddoni, and lead a small party of Nephite soldiers to fall upon the Gadiantons by night and frighten them away.

Trusting to his Nephite costume and to the disguise of darkness, he always took an active part in each expedition, and succeeded each time in escaping recognition at the hands of his supposed friends.

When Gidgiddoni warned him that if he were recognized by the Gadiantons his usefulness to the Nephites would end, he always agreed that it was true, but insisted that he must have action or perish.

"I cannot play the coward," he urged, "and hide in a bush while Orpah's father is in a fight. Besides, we are fighting in God's cause and he can protect his servants. If I am a worthy instrument he will not let my usefulness end, and if I am not worthy he can discard me, whether I fight or hide, and raise up a better in my place."

And Gidgiddoni could not but grant his logic, being a man of faith himself; so he continued to take an active part in harassing the Gadiantons until they gave up in despair and abandoned all attempts to occupy the Nephite cities, even though their food was becoming continually scarcer and more difficult to obtain in the wilderness.

At length Giddianhi again consulted Jarom privately. "Is there no chance that the Nephites will soon be reduced to famine?" he demanded.

"Not the slightest, O Chief, unless you call a few years soon," Jarom replied.

Giddianhi paced back and forth a moment, and then with a gesture of despair demanded, "What are we then to do?"

"You told me two years ago, O Giddianhi, that a spy was a spy and not a Captain. I recommended then what I thought would be the safest

measure, but my suggestion was not heeded. It is too late now. I can only report that the Nephites are safe behind the fortifications we gave them plenty of time to build and that they are not in any danger of starving for years yet. What to do, I shall not presume to say."

"Then go," Giddianhi commanded, "And I shall consult others." Jarom smilingly complied. The next morning it was proclaimed among the Gadianton host that the counselors of Giddianhi had decided upon a great battle with the Nephites, to be fought in the open. Jarom was to carry the challenge to Lachoneus and then return to report to them. They would present the most frightful appearance to the Nephites possible, arming themselves plentifully, covering their shorn heads with head plates, wearing a lambskin about their loins, being dyed in blood, and generally making themselves appear terrible, that their enemies might be struck with fear and never suspect that hunger drove them.

Once more Jarom bore a letter into the city of Zarahemla, this time containing a definite challenge to the armies of the Nephites. And this time the warlike desires of the soldiers were not checked by their leaders, but were encouraged to the utmost. Jarom rejoiced that at length the waiting was to end in action, and thousands of both Nephites and Gadiantons rejoiced with him.

IX

Dressed as a Gadianton, Jarom did not this time have to call upon the friendship of Gidgiddoni to gain admittance within the Nephite walls. Instead he formally announced himself a messenger from Giddianhi bearing a letter to Lachoneus and was conducted by Nephite soldiers into the presence of the Chief Judge. As a messenger, instead of a spy, he had no time to use for his own purposes, but was treated as a guest of war and lodged in the palace of the Nephite ruler.

(Turn to page 416)

The Gadianton

(From page 380)

Nevertheless, he was permitted to accompany Lachoneus during the two days he remained upon the journey the Chief Judge made from one point to another to address the multitudes. So, instead of losing himself in the crowd to hear what was said, he stood near the speaker, garbed in the wild costume of the Robbers, and knowing himself a symbol to the people of their hated foes. Yet he had no cause to fear, in spite of the curses some of them hurled in his direction, for the presence of Lachoneus and his guard was a sufficient protection.

This time the orators were all warlike, stirring the people to enthusiasm at white heat. Yet, still, there was much said of repentance, of faith, of prayer, and of Divine assistance. So that it still seemed that only the costume and not the words distinguished Judge, priest, or soldier. Nor was it difficult to rouse the Nephites. For two long years they had been waiting and preparing for this announcement. And the greatest task Gidgiddoni and Lachoneus had faced had been that of keeping them content to wait. So now, it seemed to Jarom that the entire land was aflame with enthusiasm. He even fancied that the women themselves would have assumed arms had the men hesitated, so courageously did they urge on the ones they loved, to fight and conquer the Gadiantons.

The two days ended, he was conducted formally to the walls of the city, and sent upon his return trip to bear the response of the Nephites to the Gadianton challenge. And he fancied that merely because of his costume the soldiers who had often admitted him in the name of Gidgiddoni failed to recognize him when he came and went in the name of Giddiauli.

As soon as he was out of sight of the observant guards upon the walls, he went to the secret cache kept for him by Gidgiddoni, and filling a generous

bag with the food there provided, returned to the headquarters of the Robber Chief.

He carefully concealed that which he had brought, and kept it for himself. Then he reported to Giddianhi his reception at the hands of the Nephites and their enthusiasm to meet the Gadiantons in open battle.

There succeeded a wave of enthusiasm among the members of the Secret Order not entirely unlike that which he had witnessed in the lands of Zarahemla and of Bountiful. Yet here there was no mention of God, except when his name was used in foul oaths of bloodthirsty cruelty. Nor was there talk of repentance or faith or prayer. Rather it was of plunder, of slaves, and of subjecting the Nephites to the laws of the Gadianton order.

There was little enthusiasm among the women, because in the scantiness of food among them, the major portion of it was used for the sustenance of the fighting men, and save where some man had a love for his mate sufficient to prompt him to share with her, the women were half starved and consequently weary and lacking in fire.

Always Jarom had noticed what a vast difference there was between the women of the mountains and those of the valleys. Beautiful women there were here, but none whose beauty was that of happy and satisfied maturity. They faded at a much younger age than did their sisters below, and even among the younger and more beautiful of them there was a hard artificial something in their looks that had always repelled Jarom. Seeing them now, as they watched or assisted the men in their gathering and preparations for battle, they seemed almost fantastically deformed by the lives they led. For hunger, with a cruel brush, had painted doubly upon their faces each line of bitterness and lack of hope.

Contrasting them with the hosts of lovely women he had just seen in the plain of Zarahemla and Bountiful, Jarom reflected that here was the greatest sign of the evil in the Order of Gadianton. That its men should eat while the women hungered, that the weaker members should be forced to sacrifice for the stronger, this seemed to him an outward and visible sign of the evil in their lives. For only where the mothers and daughters of a race are well cared for and contented and at least as interested in great national movements as are its men, is there a healthy national existence, Jarom told himself.

Another thing he noted among the Gadiantons as contrasted with the Nephites was the scarcity of children. Down there it had seemed to him that children were everywhere, working, playing, being taught. Here the children numbered scarcely as many as the half-starved women. And this, too, he thought condemned their system. Where children are numerous and happy; where women, strong and beautiful, stand side by side with their men; there, Jarom said mentally, and there only, is a happy people, ruled by love and peace.

He had known that there were thousands of Robbers living in the mountains, but he had scarcely realized the extent of the domain ruled by Giddianhi until now. For days they were gathering under their leaders to pass before the door of the great council hall and be observed by their Chief Captain. Armed, heads shaven, dressed in skins, dyed in blood, and some with their faces painted hideously, they saluted Giddianhi with the secret signs of their band and passed on to their rendezvous in the foot hills.

There Jarom followed them idly, open battle requiring no services of a spy. Some of them offered to remove his hair and share their arms with him, but he told them he was a spy and might be called by Giddianhi to enter the Nephite domains, in which case a

shaven head might mean a body without any head at all. So they left him unmolested.

At last their great host was all assembled and Giddianhi placed himself at the head of them and led them out onto the plains, where in the distance, the glitter of sunshine upon burnished weapons told that Gidgiddoni's host awaited them.

Jarom, because of his signal services as a spy was allowed the honor of accompanying the Chief until they should approach the enemy, when he was to retire to the rear and watch the battle. He had no intention of remaining idle, however, and he studied Giddianhi,—his form, his size, the color of his clothing, the size of his sheepskin, his manner of walk, as he had never before studied any man. Before the two armies met there was not a man among the Gadiantons who could so surely have identified their chief, nor one of them whom Jarom would have mistaken for him. He knew Giddianhi as a mother knows her child.

It was evening before the two mighty hosts could reach each other, and so they camped that night, waiting for the morning. And as soon as the sun rose, both hosts were again in motion, steadily approaching each other. Soon they came close enough so that they could easily distinguish the appearance of individuals in the opposing ranks.

The Nephites were well armed, and clothed in defensive armour, brightly polished.

Every vulnerable part of the body was well protected. And they presented a gleaming mass of warlike foes to the eyes of the Gadiantons.

But the Gadiantons themselves with their shaven heads, their bloody stain, and the appearance of fierce animals—given them by their skins about the loins, were a hideous and terrible sight. No sooner did the Nephite armies perceive them, than with one impulse they dropped to their knees and bowed their heads. This to the Gadiantons meant but one thing—terror. Like one man

they raised a wild shout of triumph and dashed wildly ahead to finish easily these weak foes who fell to the earth in fear at the very sight of them.

But Jarom, well to one side, interpreted the action of the Nephites differently. To him their kneeling posture meant, not terror but trust. Not weakness but faith. He was not surprised, then, to see the prostrate forms rise up sturdily to meet their savage foes as they dashed ahead; nor to hear from them an answering shout of courage that rang on and on and on, as the surprised Gadiantons fell back under the shock of their flashing swords.

"No prisoners." Jarom heard the Nephites shouting. "We take no prisoners, today."

And now it seemed to him that all the forces of confusion and Hell had broken loose upon the plain. The shouts of challenge, the groans of the wounded, the curses of the Gadiantons, and the prayers of the Nephites blended into one vast human roar that swelled and sank in a sort of barbarous rhythm, but never ceased. The flash and fall of swords upon armour looked like millions of tiny torches playing above the terrible hand to hand conflict. Trampling of many feet stirred the grassy plain and pounded its living green into dust that rose in a fine cloud to settle again upon bloodstained armour and shining steel alike. And steadily, surely, relentlessly, the Gadiantons were driven back and back and back.

The sun rose to the Zenith and started upon her western journey. Still the roar and dust rose above the fierce and courageous contestants. And now Jarom, who had remained all this time a passive onlooker as Giddianhi had commanded, ended his inactivity. Before, he had merely followed as the Nephites drove the Gadiantons backward, but always he had kept his eyes upon one form among the Robbers. Giddianhi he had watched as that redoubtable warrior had battled through

the hours. And even from a distance he could see now that Giddianhi had grown weary, that it would not be long before a Nephite sword found his heart.

He had marked where Giddianhi had felled a Nephite, and making his way carefully over the bodies of the dead and dying, Jarom found this victim of the Robber Chief and borrowed from his inert body sword and armour. Unnoticed by those who could hinder him, he donned the armour and carried the sword bare in his hand. Then he studied the progressing battle until he once more located the retreating form of Giddianhi and with a shrill yell sprang toward it. Over the prostrate victims of the fight, among whom Gadiantons were far more numerous than Nephites, he flung himself into the raging battle and sought Giddianhi.

Many a Gadianton struck at him, but he only parried their thrusts and hastened on in pursuit of their leader. Nephites, seeing him so fresh and enthusiastic gained new courage and drove their foes still more rapidly before them. But it was not so easy to overtake Giddianhi as it had been to find him with the eye. For the Gadiantons, loyal even in defeat, and knowing that no battle was considered quite decisive unless the chief commander fell upon one side or the other, made a living barrier between him and those whom they fought. Though this barrier yielded and retreated and occasionally broke, still the form of Giddianhi was as a rallying standard to them and they always gathered again.

It seemed to the determined spy that he should never be able to reach his prey. Each time he avoided or struck down one who stood between them, another took his place. But he was persistent, and gradually a little knot of Nephites gathered about him, as instinctively as though they had known him for a leader. Seeing that his vigor and freshness were constituting him a sort of petty captain, Jarom took advantage of this to advance toward Gid-

dianhi more rapidly than the main body of Nephites were progressing.

He did not communicate his purpose to his new followers, but they soon realized that he had some definite person among the Gadiantons whom he sought, and thinking it must naturally be a man of importance, they drew the closer to him and relieved him of the necessity of felling the Gadiantons who came between. Thus they gradually formed into a moving V with Jarom at its point, and the two on each side of him joined in striking down any who challenged him while those further to the side and rear widened the gap.

So at last, driving determinedly ahead with only one object in view, Jarom at length broke his way through the guard about Giddianhi and his sword struck that of his hated Robber Captain. The shout of triumph with which he parried the thrusts of Giddianhi and rained blow after blow upon his head shield, told the Nephites that at last he had met the foe he sought, and they spread out, leaving him to battle alone with the Chief, while they each sought another opponent.

In spite of the difficulty he had found in reaching Giddianhi, Jarom was far fresher than his opponent. But for this, he would soon have found himself at a disadvantage, for though he had been trained to use the sword skillfully, he was neither so strong nor so skillful as was the Gadianton Chief. Only his comparative freshness balanced Giddianhi's superiority as a fighter. So the spy, whose gifts lay in his legs and his wits, found it no easy task to overcome the greatest fighter among the Gadiantons.

He was forced to take the defensive, but the fact that the Gadiantons were retreating made it necessary for Giddianhi to keep abreast of his friends lest he be surrounded by Nephites. Whenever it was necessary for him to step over a fallen soldier, or a rock or irregularity in the ground, Jarom, who could see where to step, gained a slight

advantage, and he soon learned to strike harder and faster at these times.

Giddianhi tried to anger him by taunts and jeers, but Jarom paid no attention, nor did he reply. He did not wish Giddianhi to know with whom he fought lest others of the Gadiantons also learn it. He could see that the approaching night would end the battle long before the victorious Nephites could exterminate them and he desired still to be considered by the Robbers as their friend. So he wasted no breath in retorting to Giddianhi's jibes, but devoted his every energy to finding some advantage that he might end the contest.

He noted finally that Giddianhi had a slight wound upon his arm and that one certain stroke seemed more difficult for the Robber to make because of the pain it caused the wound. This stroke necessitated his lifting his arm, and so Jarom, using his wits where strength failed, watched carefully the backward steps of Giddianhi and each time he had to step uncertainly, the spy aimed a blow at his head. Again and again he repeated this, and though Giddianhi always parried the stroke successfully, his arm grew perceptibly weaker, the lines of pain deepened about his grim mouth, and a perspiration that was not the result of exercise but rather of weakness broke out upon his face.

Pressing relentlessly this slight advantage he had gained, Jarom pursued the weakening Robber ever more determinedly. He forced Giddianhi to retreat more rapidly, and at last guided him, by sword strokes, to a small hole into which he must step backwards with one foot unseeingly. As the Robber's foot went down into this depression, he staggered with the unexpectedness of it, and this time Jarom's swift sword crashed through his defense and struck his head plate with such force as to stun him. His sword dropped and Jarom hesitated not to strike off his head and lift it on high, proclaiming, "Giddianhi is dead!"

(To be continued)