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The Gadianton: A Story of Zarahemla, Chapter X

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The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARAHEMLA

By E. Heloise Merkle

X

Giddianhi is dead! Giddianhi is dead!"

The call rang clearly across the field of battle and was taken up and carried on and on to the furthest extremities of the fighters. Its result was instantaneous. The Nephites, shouting it triumphantly, pressed their beaten foes backward with renewed fury. The Gadiantons, shouting it in despair, ceased to defend their retreat and turned to flee in disorganized terror before their pursuing enemies.

"We take no prisoners today," and "Giddianhi is dead!" became now the rallying cries of the Nephites, and they raced after their fleeing enemies relentlessly. On and on they drove the Gadiantons until they reached the very edge of the wilderness. Here at last they stopped, as the sun was setting, and turned back to count the dead and seek refreshment in their camp.

Jarom, knowing he would not be missed by the scattered and broken Gadiantons, returned with the Nephites and presented himself at the tent of Gidgiddoni where he was received more cordially than ever before by the Nephites' Great Captain.

"Leave us alone," Gidgiddoni commanded, and as he was obeyed turned to Jarom saying, "My son, was it not you whose sword I saw sever the head of our chief enemy?"

"It was I," Jarom answered, adding modestly, "I had a little account with him which my mother asked me upon her death-bed to settle. But let us talk of the greater problems which lie before us. The future and not the past."

"You wish to speak of Orpah, do you not?" Gidgiddoni responded.

"The name of your lovely daughter is ever foremost upon my tongue," Jarom replied.

"And have you come to claim her, tonight? It seems to me that you have fulfilled your promise to help us overcome the Gadiantons. It has been the bloodiest day since Lehi left Jerusalem, so many have fallen. But the Nephites have triumphed!"

It was apparent that as a General he could not restrain his joy at the victory gained by his army, but Jarom shook his head at the words.

"The Gadiantons are overcome in this battle, and thoroughly beaten," he agreed, "but they are not yet exterminated. Thousands of them escaped into the wilderness and they will rally again, choose a new leader, and once more attempt to conquer the Nephites. Therefore I cannot yet claim the dear reward you offer me. Because I asked you to give me Orpah for a bride when the Gadiantons were no more. Is it not so?"

"You are right," Gidgiddoni agreed, the triumph fading from his face as he considered the possibility of greater struggles in the future. "But why, then, have you sought me tonight?"

"I have dared to come in the hope that you would once more listen to my humble counsel as you did two years ago," Jarom replied.

"You have then a plan for the future that may exterminate the Robbers?"

"A plan that will at least give the Nephites great advantage over them."

"The plan you offered before has

proven very wise. Tell me your new one."

"It is rather a continuation of the old than a new one. It is this. The Nephites, overconfident, perhaps, because of today's great triumph, may desire to return to their wasted lands and again live as they did before. Do not allow them to do so. Tell them that while a handful of Gadiantons remains in the mountains, there will be no peace for the Nephites. Remind them that this terrible menace was organized by Gadianton and only a few of his friends to protect Kishkumen after his murder. Tell them how a snowball upon the mountain top, rolling downward, gathers more snow to itself and gains speed until it becomes an avalanche that wrecks and destroys all that lies in its path. Teach them not to leave their fortifications while the smallest snowball of Gadiantons remains to threaten them from the mountains. Can you hold them within the walls, O Gidgiddoni?"

"Our supplies have scarce begun to diminish. There is not the slightest need for one person to leave our fortifications as yet. Yes, Jarom, I have not yet lost my authority. I can hold them there. But is that all of your plan?"

"The rest depends somewhat upon the Gadiantons themselves. They have now tried two things,—the first, occupying the desolated homes of the Nephites, which brought them nothing save danger of being discovered and killed,—the second, open battle which brought them today's defeat. There has been one other plan constantly urged by some, and when a new leader is appointed he will seek to adopt a new policy. This third plan is one of siege. Whoever succeeds Giddianhi—and I think I could name you the man, for Zemnah is best known for valor and wisdom among us—will probably adopt the plan of siege. They still hope that I have lied to them about the extent of the Nephites' food supply, and it may be possible to make

them think they can yet starve you before famine overcomes them."

"Is there, then, no Gadianton save yourself who has ever entered our walls?"

"You know better than myself what effective precautions you have taken that none might enter," Jarom replied.

"Yes, but it is always possible that the greatest precautions may fail at some point. But proceed."

"If the Nephites will send occasional large hunting parties forth from the cities of Zarahemla and Bountiful, and if they will risk their lives by tilling some of the soil lying outside the walls, the Gadiantons will be deceived into thinking it is necessary for them to get food outside their place of security. Then they will be sure that I have lied when I have told them you do not lack food, and they will undertake to cut off all such excursions by besieging you within your walls. At night, then, when they are camped in the plain, I shall come to you and lead your soldiers, if you will let me, to the camps of the Gadiantons so that you can surprise and overcome them. What think you of the plan?"

"It sounds wise and like the cunning of the man who first suggested that we gather together for defense. But if it did not appear wise to me, I should accept it because your first suggestion was so successful. And is that all?"

"That is all now. Being no prophet I cannot see further into the future than my knowledge of men prompts me to guess. When we have tried this, something else may suggest itself. I shall return now, to my supposed friends in the mountains."

"No, Jarom," Gidgiddoni exclaimed, "You are weary with the toils of this day. And it would take you too long without food or rest to reach them. Remain here and eat and sleep and when you are refreshed will be soon enough to return. See, I have a portion of my tent prepared for you," and he lifted a curtain which had con-

cealed a small apartment fitted up luxuriously as a sleeping room. The soft couch looked extremely inviting to Jarom, but he hesitated. He knew Gidgiddoni was right and that if he did not sleep here, he would find it necessary to sleep upon the bare ground before he could reach his destination.

He did not sleep long, however, before he was wakened by the pangs of hunger. He thought it strange that Gidgiddoni should have forgotten to offer him food, as soon as consciousness told him why he had not slept longer. He sat up on the couch, debating whether to seek refreshment or to try to sleep again and forget it.

"Are you awake, Jarom?" asked a low voice whose source he could not see, but which he recognized with a thrill of joy as belonging to Orpah.

"I believe so," he replied, "but hearing your voice here makes me think I am dreaming."

A soft laugh answered him, and a white hand lifted another curtain, letting in a glow of light from a further apartment. Jarom's eager eyes noted that there was a table spread luxuriously with all the viands of the well-stocked Nephite store that could be most tempting to a hungry man.

"My voice and presence are no dream. I have often accompanied father when he went out to battle, as there is no danger in the tents. He told me to let you sleep a while before asking you to eat, saying when your first weariness was gone hunger would waken you. Perhaps, then, if you are a little rested, you will enjoy this," and she motioned to the loaded table.

"Is there anything of which Gidgiddoni and his lovely daughter do not think?" Jarom asked, as he entered the apartment where Orpah stood, and availed himself of a basin of water to remove the stains of conflict.

"We should be ungrateful if we forgot your comfort today," she replied.

While he ate, Orpah eagerly questioned him concerning the events of

the day, and Jarom discovered a new delight in painting himself as a hero to the eyes of the woman he loved. But at last story and food alike were finished, and in spite of his desire to stay awake and enjoy more of Orpah's company, Jarom found his rebellious eyes growing heavier and heavier, and it was only by conscious efforts that he smothered the persistent yawns.

"Is there nothing more that you can eat?" Orpah asked, when he had definitely stopped.

"More would do me as much harm as this has done me good," he replied.

"Then perhaps you will return to the couch and finish your broken slumber."

"I would rather talk with you than sleep," he replied.

"Father said you were anxious to return to the mountains, so I supposed you would prefer rest," she replied. And there was a finality in her tone that told him he would gain nothing by protestations.

Jarom arose, therefore, and approached the curtain hanging between the table and the couch. There he paused, and very tenderly took her in his arms and kissed her. Then, as she drew away with a sigh, while her eyes smiled into his, he passed into the sleeping room and flinging himself upon the couch, yielded to his weariness, and dreamed of her.

It was morning when he wakened again. And this time Gidgiddoni and Orpah ate with him, and he had no opportunity to speak to the girl alone before he left for the mountains. But their eyes exchanged silent messages and the memory of their kiss the night before was still fresh and sweet with him as he hurried away.

He had resumed the dress of a Gadianton as soon as he reached the battlefield where he could so easily procure one, and he was joined by many a weary straggler of the band on his way to the chief headquarters where Giddianhi had so recently ruled supreme.

None of them suspected that it was not a Nephite soldier who had slain

their chief, and some few of them openly expressed their preference for a new leader. The name of Zemnarimah was almost the only one mentioned as a possible chieftain. Some others there were who had distinguished themselves above the rest for bravery, but Zemnarimah's name was mentioned most frequently and loudly.

All that day and the next night and the next day, the defeated soldiers were straggling back, the wounded being the slowest to return because of the steepness of the roads. Some of the Gadiantons, taking pity upon these, went out with chariots and horses to bring them in, but most of them sullenly left the weaker ones to get back or die upon the way as best they could. Jarom, in spite of his hatred for the entire band and his desire to annihilate them, could not but pity

these, and he turned his lonely home into a small temporary hospital for the dressing and caring for their wounds. He told himself grimly that they would be less grateful for his kindness if they knew what he had done against them.

At last it seemed that all had returned who ever would, and the choosing of a new leader was assumed. Jarom, more interested in relieving pain, did not attend the great council called for this purpose, but remained with his wounded patients. It was only a brief time after the decision was reached, however, before a messenger came seeking him.

"Zemnarimah is our leader," was the message, "and commands Jarom's presence in the private council." Promptly Jarom obeyed the summons.

(To be continued)



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