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The Gadianton: A Story of Zarahemla, Chapter II

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The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARAHLEMLA

By E. Heloise Merkley

• II.

Giddianhi was not the only one who was surprised that this comparatively unknown and unrenowned young spy should dare to join the councils of his chiefs, in spite of the nominal democracy among them and the supposed tradition that young as well as old had an equal right to make suggestions. So, as Jarom stepped forward to explain the plan that had so suddenly entered his head, he had the full attention of them all.

"O Chief," he said, formally bowing before Giddianhi, "the hated Chief Captain of the Nephite armies has but one child. It is a daughter, and he loves her most foolishly. Now, surely, it would be humiliation enough and grief enough to him, if we were to enter his very home and carry her off before his eyes. That the Gadiantons whom he thinks he once conquered should so dare to insult him would burn into his pride like hot iron. And the wild stories with which Nephites frighten children would all come to his mind, so that the uncertainty of what we might do with her would eat his heart like a viper. That she is his only child would make our vengeance the surer, and that he never could hope to regain her as he lost her would break his courage so that in battle he would no longer be the foe some of us half fear."

As Jarom ceased speaking, silence reigned in the council hall of the robbers while his words carried their full significance to every mind. At last Giddianhi replied.

"Your plan is clever and daring, and befitting the son of your father. There is but one question I would ask

you before accepting it. Who is to be the one to enter the heart of the Nephite city and seek the home of its Chief Captain and carry off from under his very eyes the daughter he loves so well?"

"To enter the Nephite city and penetrate to any part of it is not difficult. Are we not Nephites by blood? Do we not speak their language? Can we not wear their clothes as gracefully as they? Here we are different from them. There it is easy to be as one of them. I have done it many times. I am not the only one among us who has. And as for the difficulty of penetrating the Chief Captain's home and carrying off his daughter—what place would they so little expect us to invade? Therefore what place would be easier to enter? Would they suppose we would dare such a thing? And not supposing so, what guards would they set? From a tree above their heads, I today heard this daughter of his tell him that one week from today she would entertain a company of children at their home! Will children stay in the house? Would it be a difficult thing to carry a maiden away from a garden when her only protectors were children? There would be no difficulty in accomplishing the feat—to begin with. The trouble would not start until she was gone, and who is so skillful in avoiding and checking pursuit as are the Gadiantons? Unless you desire to entrust this enterprise to one higher in your esteem than a humble scout, or unless one more worthy of the favor demand the privilege, allow me to undertake it, O Giddianhi. Let me have guards to check pursuit, and I promise to present to you as a captive the daughter of Gidgidoni, one week from tonight."

"Boldly spoken, and cleverly, O Jarom. You shall have whatever assistance you demand. If others wish to undertake the feat, they shall do it under your command. And if you succeed, we will find a reward worthy the accomplishment. Tell me, Jarom, is this daughter of Gidgiddoni, upon whom you spied so well—say, is she not beautiful?"

"She is the most beautiful—" Jarom began, and then checked himself, blushing, to add tamely, "Most men would think her very lovely to look upon."

A roar of laughter greeted his confusion, and he paled instantly with anger and glanced furiously about the company. Giddianhi, checking his own smiles, frowned so that others sobered quickly, and he said, "Very well, Jarom, if she is beautiful that is enough. When you bring her before me, you bring your own reward with you. Once abducted and presented here as a captive, she shall be yours."

"But what would I do with a girl?" exclaimed Jarom innocently, and was greeted with another roar of laughter, this time accompanied by vulgar jibes that stung him to fury. But for the commanding presence of his chief, he would instantly have been in a fight with the loudest laughter.

"Keep her for a sister," Giddianhi replied, with a half hidden sneer in the words, and then added more seriously, "I know that since the death of your father, we have perhaps forgotten what we owe his widow, but this insult to Gidgiddoni will remind us, and we will see that you have means to provide fittingly for a sister of such high birth as this. Do you know her name?"

"I know only that she called the hated Gidgiddoni father," Jarom lied, warned by the merriment that anything more he might say of her would only cause fresh laughter. It seemed that it would be profanation to utter the name of Orpah in that vulgar company. Never before had his companions seemed evil to him. Now he looked at them as upon a company of hideous beasts. He would keep her as his sister

and he would protect her from their ugly passions. He was glad now that Giddianhi had made her the reward for his daring. To sell her to the highest bidder in this vulgar crowd as he had seen other abducted maidens sold, would be worse than casting a star into the mire. The hatred he had been coaxing to burn in his heart toward her, suddenly turned into a consuming passion to protect her from evil. He wished he had never suggested so base a plan. But still—the vision of her lovely face and a fancied echo of her sweet voice came to him—still it would be wonderful to see her among the mountains. He would not weaken now, and it would be a splendid revenge upon her hated father. Again a pang of pity shot through him, as the thought of that commanding form bowed by grief, that handsome face marked by tears, came to him. He shook it off resolutely. He hated Gidgiddoni and would love to see him suffer.

During the next week he was busy planning and preparing for the abduction. In all the narrow passes of the mountains he set guards, when at last the day came to do as he had planned. About the garden of Gidgiddoni, which he had not the least difficulty in locating when he entered the city dressed as any inhabitant of Zarahemla might dress, he placed more guards. And in an angle of the street not far away he stationed a chariot driven by the most skillful horseman among the Gadian-ton and drawn by the swiftest animals. Then, armed only with a long soft scarf and a flowing veil, he slipped into the garden during the midday meal and climbed once more into a tree to wait.

It was not long before the same children came who had been with Orpah in the ruined garden outside the walls. And soon they were outside the house and listening to her stories, singing with her, and finally romping as they had done a week before. Selecting a moment when their noise was loudest and when all the servants of the house were out of sight, Jarom

dropped quietly through the branches of the tree, landed directly behind Orpah, and flung the soft scarf about her mouth and then again around her head so that it blinded her eyes. Quickly hiding the gag and blindfold with the veil he dropped over her head, he lifted her in his arms and sprang toward the gate.

The children stared in silence a moment, and then began shrieking wildly for help. But they had been so noisy before that it was some time before the servants distinguished the more serious tones of terror and came to see what the matter was. As he passed through the gate, Jarom heard one call out, "A Gadian-ton! It was a Gadian-ton! He carried Orpah away." Then his confederates dropped into a group behind him to hinder any rescuers who might follow, and he hurried toward the chariot. He had no more time to notice what went on behind him. For Orpah had now recovered her breath and realized what had happened to her, and with all the strength of her lithe young body she was kicking and fighting to get away from him.

Tighter and tighter he drew his sinewy arms about her, and it seemed to him that he must be strangling her, before she ceased to struggle and relaxed in his arms. Then a sense of the warmth and softness of her body thrilled through him and he carried her very tenderly the last few steps. But the second her feet touched the floor of the chariot, she was fighting again, and it so surprised him that he fairly lost his grip upon her and the charioteer had to assist him to conquer her.

"Drive!" he exclaimed, as soon as he could pin her arms against her body with his own. "Drive, there is no time to spare!" And the charioteer obeyed barely in time. For the cry of Gadian-ton had roused the neighborhood and pursuit was beginning. As the chariot whirled down the street, Jarom looked back and saw that his companions were playing their part well, pretending to

join the pursuit and stumbling, sprawling and hindering the others very effectively. They were safe he knew. Again he found it necessary to exert all his strength and agility to keep his balance and maintain his hold upon the struggling captive.

Down one street after another and around dizzy corners they whirled toward the city walls. Then through the gate and on the little used road toward the mountains. They were miles away from Zarahemla and had changed horses twice, before Orpah, exhausted and discouraged into submission, ceased to struggle.

They drove more slowly now, as no signs of dangerous pursuit had developed. Before nightfall they passed the guards at the first narrow passage and Jarom breathed a sigh of relief that it was now too late for Orpah by any possibility to escape.

"It is impossible for the Chief Captain of the Nephites to rescue his daughter now," he told her, "So you need not be gagged any longer." And he removed the veil and scarf.

Brushing her hands several times before her eyes to clear away the mists left by the blindfold, Orpah gazed about her. Her face lighted with pleasure at the beauty of the magnificent scenery, but she shrank involuntarily when she discovered that they were on a narrow road high above a deep gorge. Instantly checking her fear, she stood upright in the chariot and calmly examined the rapidly changing views as the passing of the chariot revealed them to her. Once, near a high peak the scene opened up so that she could catch a glimpse of the wide plain from whence they had come. Quickly her eyes filled with tears, and she whispered to herself, "Zarahemla! Father!" But she saw that Jarom noticed her emotion, and with a proud lift of her dainty chin turned her face toward the horses and let no other sign of sorrow escape.

Jarom was burning with a desire to talk to her, to hear her voice, to apolo-

gize and explain why he had done this thing. He grew momentarily more miserable as he found how difficult it was to introduce a friendly conversation with a young girl whom he had just abducted from a joyous and protected life to one of the most formidable dangers.

Never before had he analyzed the life of the Gadiantons as he was doing now. But now he was looking beneath the surface of the things he had accepted as right and proper all his life and finding them wrong and ugly. Abductions such as this—what justification was there for them? Robberies, murders, savage cruelty to such prisoners as were captured who refused to join the band—why should they be necessary? Did not other people down in the valleys live by the work they did or by trading with each other? Why should he and his friends steal from them to live in idleness and savage hatred and fear all their lives among the mountains? What had the Nephites done to wrong the Gadiantons, except such things as were necessary in order to defend themselves against robbery and murder? Had this innocent girl's father inflicted wrong upon him in defending his people against the Gadianton's one half so much as the Gadiantons had wronged the Nephites by making such defense a necessity? Why should he be a Gadianton spy and live such a life when there were a thousand occupations on that wide plain below in which he could engage to earn an honest living and wrong no man and call no man enemy?

Torn by this tumult of new questions and emotions he stood silently beside Orpah as the charioteer drove them skillfully over the dangerous roads to the presence of Giddianhi, their chief. It was twilight, the long, lovely twilight of the canyons, when they reached the spot. Curious men, women and children stood to watch the arrival of the prisoner and insult her with taunts and jeers. But so quietly did she follow her captors, so calmly

did she ignore the insults, and with so much dignity did she glance through them as though they were not there, that the words died upon their tongues, and comments upon her beauty took their place.

The charioteer dropped behind as they entered the audience chamber, and Jarom instinctively refrained from touching Orpah as she walked beside him toward the chief.

"O mighty Giddianhi, I present to you the prisoner I promised; Orpah, daughter of the Nephite Gidgiddoni," Jarom said, and then stepped back into the crowd, leaving Orpah alone in the open space, facing the leader of the Gadiantons.

"Are you the daughter of the Chief (Captain of the Nephite armies, called Gidgiddoni)?"

"I am," she replied quietly.

Giddianhi turned to the others, announcing formally, as was the custom in such matter: "Oh, Gadiantons, through the skill of the spy Jarom, we have successfully insulted our chief enemy by abducting his daughter. That the insult be complete we cannot accept ransom for her, but must keep her with us. What then shall be done to dispose of her?"

From the group closest to his seat stepped forth a tall, handsome man, past the first flush of youth, but scarcely yet nearing middle age. His dark eyes, strong features, and rich costume, sparkling with jewels, proclaimed one who was born to dominate and who was at least near to achieving his birthright. But there was an expression upon the handsome face from which Orpah instinctively shrank in fear and repulsion. She could not have told why she feared, nor what made her suppose him to be evil, but she was overcome with the emotion, especially as she heard his words.

"O, Giddianhi," he proposed, "the prisoner is young and beautiful. Let us not therefore doom her to the fate of the servant, at least for a few years yet. Her beauty is too great to be so

wasted. Give me, therefore, the privilege of turning into the general coffers, such a sum as shall be decided by the council, and I will take her to my house and with luxury and beauty reconcile her to the life of the Gadiantons."

His eyes met hers as he concluded, and Orpah read his meaning more clearly than his words had implied. She shuddered and turned appealingly to Giddianhi. But what she would have said was interrupted by Jarom, who sprang forward exclaiming, "Your word, O Giddianhi, was given me before I undertook the abduction, that the daughter of Gidgiddoni should be my reward for success. Do not, then, sell her to Zemnarihah."

"It was a suggestion only, Jarom, not a promise, and you said you had no use for a maiden when I made the suggestion. We will give you the price

Zemnarihah pays for her instead. Take it and be satisfied."

"Ah, but you insisted that I should take her, nevertheless, O Chief, and told me to make her my sister. My mother's heart has long yearned for a daughter. I claim the maiden and not the money. Zemnarihah has other women. Let him be satisfied with them or abduct new ones from among the Nephites. This one I claim, by virtue of obtaining her as well as because you offered her to me."

Jarom was trembling now, almost as horrified at the thought of Orpah becoming the victim of Zemnarihah as she was herself. And his fear was increased by his knowledge of the importance of Zemnarihah among them. He saw how Giddianhi hesitated, fearing the anger of one only second to himself, yet dreading to even seem to break a promise.

(To be continued)

Birds in the Bible

By Jasper B. Sinclair

In the story of the Creation birds are the second of the creatures endowed with life. First came the denizens of the sea, then the birds. After the account of the Creation one of the earliest mentions of birds is at the time of the deluge. When Noah was desirous of ascertaining whether the waters were subsiding, it will be recalled that he employed two kinds of birds, first a raven, and then a dove.

Birds are also mentioned in the passage of the Israelites through the desert. At one of the times when starvation faced them it is told that "there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp." This is one of the earliest records of bird migrations.

There are at least 300 different ref-

erences to birds in the Bible. Thirty-one species are mentioned. One hundred and thirteen of the birds mentioned are general in the sense that they are simply called "birds." The rest refer directly to certain species.

The dove is mentioned 35 times, the eagle 32, the raven, cock and hen are mentioned twelve times each. The owl is mentioned 11 times, the pigeon ten, the sparrow seven, the stork six, the pelican five, the quail, swallow and vulture four times each, the ostrich, bittern, peacock and cormorant three times each, the crane, partridge, osprey, ospry, kite, cuckoo, hawk, heron, nighthawk and lapwing twice each. The glade, swan and the gier eagle are mentioned once each.—*Our Dumb Animals*.