



The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARHEMLA

By E. Heloise Merkle

IV

In the days that followed his promise to take Orpah back to her father, Jarom racked his brains in vain for a solution to the question how to do it without subjecting her to the necessity of risking her life. It seemed now that their positions were reversed. Jarom it was who spent the sleepless nights, sorrowing, while Orpah, trusting his promise, regained the power to enjoy life. Such a potent medicine is hope that in a very few days the pink stole back into her cheeks, the sparkle to her eyes, and the elasticity to her tread.

Jarom, seeing the change in her as she regained appetite and the power to sleep, told himself that she was far more lovely than before, and the wish grew that he might keep her with him among the mountains forever. For now she seemed at home in the wild scenes to which he had brought her. But he told himself that his dream was foolish. He must keep his word somehow, even at the risk of his own life. But to risk hers he could not make himself consent.

One day Orpah found him sitting pale and disconsolate in a lonely place and asked why he was so sad.

"I am unable to conceive a plan for getting you back home," he replied, "and the worry of it is driving me mad."

"Why don't you pray to God to help you think of the easiest way?" Orpah asked.

"I know not how to pray," he replied, "I believe in the God you worship, and I am sure he would answer such a prayer for your sake, because you serve him so well. But I dare not attempt to petition him—how could he

answer me, one of the Gadianton robbers?"

"But you are not wicked like most of them. You are only a Gadianton because your father was one, and not from choice. Besides, God loves us so much that he will answer a sincere prayer from the most wicked. You know he understands us better than we do ourselves, and he is always ready to help us to do right if only we will give him the smallest chance to aid us."

"Yes, you may be right. But still I do not know how to pray."

"Imagine that your own dead father had the right and the power to answer you. Would you have trouble in asking him? How would you speak to him?"

"Why, just as I would if he were alive. Just as I would ask a favor of anyone."

"Then you know how to pray. Just remember that God is our loving Father and ask him as though he stood at your side as a man."

Without another word, Orpah left him alone to solve his problem. Yet never had he been less alone, for she left with him the feeling that God was very near and was waiting for what he might say. And Jarom did as she had bade him. Simply, without kneeling, or seeking for ceremonious forms of speech, he talked with the loving Father and begged for inspiration that he might keep his promise to take Orpah back. It was the first time he had consciously prayed, and when he returned home, though his problem was not yet solved, there was with him such a sense of peace and trust as he had never before known. God had become real to Jarom,

and he waited for the way to be opened that he might fulfill his promise.

After the general council in the great hall that night, Giddianhi called a special smaller group of trusted confederates to discuss with him plans for new measures against the Nephites of a more ambitious character than he had ever before undertaken.

Jarom would have passed out with the less important members of the great band, but was called back and told that he should remain with the older men. Surprised, but gratified, he stayed. He took little part in the discussion, for he was not only younger than most of them, but he discovered that every impulse of his nature was united to protest against their cruel suggestions and to denounce the crimes they made their profession. And all the time his mind was busy with the question of how to escape with Orpah.

He scarcely knew that they had decided to challenge the entire Nephite nation to a contest of extermination, through a formal letter to their Chief Judge, which was to be couched in the most flattering and patronizing manner possible, and which was to be carried to him by the most skillful spy in their midst. And after that—war.

This decision reached, Giddianhi called for writing materials and the council filed slowly out. Again, as he would have followed, Jarom was bidden to remain. So he seated himself and waited through the long silence while Giddianhi composed his insulting epistle to Lachoneus. And still his mind was busy with the question that haunted him, so that the time did not drag. At last, as though it had been spoken aloud, he found the solution of his problem clearly before him. He could scarcely restrain a shout of triumph. A moment later the Gadianton Chief finished his letter and signed for Jarom to come and get it.

"Do you realize all that is expected of you now?" Giddianhi inquired.

"I have not yet been told," Jarom replied, "but I shall be glad to learn."

"First," the Chief explained, "you are to start tonight and deliver this epistle personally into the hands of Lachoneus. But I must warn you that its contents will not please him. So there may be some danger to the messenger."

"I shall not tremble before Lachoneus."

"Then, you are to remain in Zarahemla and observe carefully what Lachoneus says, does, and commands the people to do. You must also note how the people take the news of our challenge, and especially find out if possible whether Gidgiddoni and Lachoneus see the matter in the same way. In other words, you must act as a spy."

"How soon am I to return?"

"Within a week at least."

With his new idea burning for expression, Jarom carefully restrained mention of it until he had taken the epistle, concealed it carefully in his bosom, and started toward the door. Then he paused and returned to within a few feet of Giddianhi. The Chief did not speak, but glanced inquiringly at him. As there was no impatience in the expression of his face, Jarom took courage.

"If I might suggest a means of making it possible for me to learn the very innermost plans of the Nephites—" he said, and paused.

"Yes, proceed."

"We know that Gidgiddoni, as Chief Captain will be more important ultimately for us to cope with than will Lachoneus."

"That is right. What then?"

"If I could appear to Gidgiddoni to be his personal friend, and make him believe that I am a traitor to the Gadiantons—"

"Well—talk! How might you do this?"

"Very simply. Return his daughter to him, and say I have changed to a

true Nephite. Make him believe I am in love with her. Promise to spy for him. I am sure that by this means I could enter intimately into his councils and bring you valuable news."

Jarom ceased and for a long moment Giddianhi studied him as though to read his secret thoughts. It was with a strong effort that the younger man kept his eyes from falling before the piercing gaze of his superior. At last Giddianhi seemed satisfied.

"Then you are not in love with the girl?"

"Would I suggest taking her to Zarahemla if I love her? Do not lovers desire to keep the object of their affections in their presence?"

"She is fair to look upon and you have been intimately associated for some time. Is there some other maiden who has engaged your affections?"

"No, there is no other I should care to look at twice."

Again the Gadianton Chief studied the question silently, while Jarom prayed that he would decide in his favor. Finally he said slowly:

"Perhaps it is better to do as you have suggested than to continue to trouble him by keeping his daughter with us. Take her back, then, as though you had stolen her from us. Make him believe you are his friend, and hers, and bring us information important enough to justify such a thing or—" He did not consider it necessary to voice his threats. Jarom understood too well the relentless system of revenge to which the Gadiantons adhered. He bowed, as a sign that he understood, and retired.

Eagerly he hurried to Orpah with the news that he was to take her home that night and they must start at once. Mounted upon two sure footed horses they made their way cautiously through the darkness.

This time there was no constraint between them, but they talked freely, though in low tones lest some silent guard along their way catch something they would not wish overheard.

Jarom maintained his respectful brotherly attitude and said no word of his love. He could not know what changes had been working in the heart of the girl since he declared his passion and promised to take her back. Nor did he dream that she was continually trying to say something that would lead him to declare himself again. He thought the reason the conversation so often approached the subject was because of his own eagerness. At last Orpah grew bolder.

The night was almost spent and they had stopped to rest for a moment, without dismounting, when she summoned her courage and said timidly, "Jarom, you told me once that you—that you—cared for me, more than for a sister. Have—have I done something to make you dislike me?"

The passion of tender desire that swept over him at her words almost undermined his self control. But he forced himself to keep his hands upon his horses neck while he replied:

"My love for you has grown many times stronger than it was even when I told you of it, Orpah. But I cannot forget how unworthy I am to ask you to return it. If I could do some great and difficult thing to prove that I could become worthy of the blessing of your love, and to redeem myself from the brand of Gadianton, then I should never rest until I claimed you. But as I am now, I dare not seek your hand."

"And what do you think it necessary for you to do," asked Orpah, "in order to prove yourself worthy of my love?"

"Something so difficult as to seem impossible before hand."

"Something as difficult as the extermination of the Gadianton robbers?" Orpah spoke impulsively.

"That would not only seem impossible but would be impossible for one to do alone."

"You said you were carrying to Lachoneus an epistle which would mean war between the Nephites and

the Gadiantons. You serve the Gadiantons as a spy. Suppose that by serving the Nephites as a spy you could make it possible for them to exterminate the robbers and murderers of Gadianton—”

She paused and Jarom was silent a moment as the possibilities of the scheme flashed through his mind and the memory of his recent talk with Giddianhi reinforced it. Then he exclaimed, “It could be done, and if your father would listen to council as well as to reports of the movements of his enemies, I am the one who could do it. Orpah, tell me, dear, if I could suggest plans to your father and bring him the information from the robbers to make his plans work, would you, could you, when they are no more—would you be mine? Could you love me, Orpah, dearest?”

“I love you now, Jarom, more than any one else on earth. I would marry you anyhow, if you would consent to come and be one of us and leave the Gadiantons behind. But if you should do this thing you mention, I would not only marry you gladly, but I would be the proudest woman in the promised land.”

“Then I shall do it. For God is on the side of the Nephites, and with his help all things are possible. Sweetheart, will you seal the promise with a kiss? It is the only thing I shall ask of you until I have kept my part of the bargain.”

Eagerly Orpah leaned toward him, and reluctantly she straightened back after the long and tender kiss he gave her. Then they fell silent again, each studying out how this thing could be possible that he had agreed to do. As the dawn lightened into day and they approached the great city, they spoke little, except as the expressive glance or pressure of the fingers may be called speaking.

Leaving Orpah at the gate of her home, after he had turned the two horses loose to find their way back to the mountains alone, Jarom hastened to the Palace of the Chief Judge Lachoneus to deliver the message he brought. But he promised Orpah to return and talk with her father as soon as he could.

For the sake of maintaining his integrity in the eyes of Giddianhi, he noted carefully the indignation, disgust, and disdain with which Lachoneus received the epistle. He received with dignity the refusal of the great Nephite to reply to the insult and then hastened to seek Gidgiddoni before the messenger summoning him to consult with Lachoneus should reach him.

Prepared by Orpah's story of her adventure among the Gadiantons and its chief hero, Gidgiddoni received Jarom as a friend, but with a certain reserve which showed the young man that he must prove his sincerity before the Captain would trust him too much.

Prompted by this attitude, Jarom spoke fully and frankly to Gidgiddoni, finding it continually more easy to open his heart to the man who listened so carefully. He told how his father had been a Gadianton; how he had been taught to hate the Nephites and childlike had never questioned the rightness of what he had been taught until he was awakened to study between right and wrong by his love for Orpah; and how in the light of that love and of what she had taught him in the last few weeks he had resolved to cast his fate with the Nephites and to prove himself worthy of her love. Still Gidgiddoni seemed unconvinced. Finally Jarom found himself silently praying that the Chief Captain would believe him. Then Gidgiddoni assumed the burden of the conversation by carefully questioning him while Lachoneus' messenger waited without.

(To be continued)

“The foolish and wicked practice of profane swearing is a vice so mean and low that every person of sense and character despises it.”—Washington.