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Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter IV

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Abstract: This series is a novel based on the fictional character Mulek, an inhabitant of the city of Zarahemla during the war between Amalickiah and Moroni. The fourth part consists of chapter IV.

MULEK of Zarahemla

By J. N. WASHBURN

SYNOPSIS

MULEK loved Zarahemla, the city where his forefathers ruled, although he could not help dwelling frequently on the strange events that had changed the country from a kingdom to a republic, ruled now by judges. Mulek mocked the priests of the church and thought of the rebel Amalickiah, a man of tremendous powers and winning manners, who had caused a rupture in the country. Moroni, young chief captain of the armies of the Nephites, had taken his own cloak and made it into a banner, naming it the Title of Liberty, and calling on all to rise to its defense. Mulek found himself consumed with jealousy. Before he could join with Amalickiah, he received a note from Sarah to come to her home. There she drugged him so that he would be kept from the folly of joining in the rebellion. Amalickiah, now king of the Lamanites, raged and swore a great oath against Moroni, who went everywhere, encouraging, instructing, pleading with the people. Moroni strengthened fortresses, repaired walls, built cities, and recruited soldiers. At first Mulek followed Moroni, trying to win adulation by supporting Moroni's projects. Always in the back of his mind there rankled the thought of what Sarah had done, how she had belittled him in the sight of the servants. Even though she had saved him from public censure, he must find some way to humble her and win back his prestige.

CHAPTER IV

DISSEMBLING masterfully, Mulek continued to see Sarah, treating her with all his old deference and tenderness, taking care to let her feel that nothing had come between them. Sarah wisely refrained from mention of the part she had played in keeping him from his engagement with the conspirators.

But when he went to her on a cer-



tain day after a long absence, his anger rose as she smiled at him, certain that her possessiveness was increasing beyond his power to endure it.

"Where have you been this long time?" she inquired.

"I have been busy," he told her. "There is much to do in these disturbed times."

"What is it disturbs my Mulek?" she asked then. "Is it the thought that the Sarah might be beaten by the Gull?"

Mulek could not help laughing. She was such thoroughly good company, such an engaging young woman, that he had some regret at the moment for what he must do.

When they discussed the coming contest with Laban, Sarah could not refrain from smiling in appreciation of the compliment paid her in having her name on the glistening sides of his superb craft. She asked herself, as she had done many times before, when he would do her a still greater honor, the greatest within his power, and she became wistful at the very thought of it.

When at last Mulek departed from Sarah, it was as all his other departings had been. Not by word or expression did he indicate that he was other than the devoted adorer he had been.

One day, prompted by a vagrant whim, he made his way to the business establishment of Jacob, the apothecary. Arrived there, he admired the flowers and plants, the stocks of medicines. He complimented the master on his good judgment and management, on the size of his business.

"It is true," admitted Jacob modestly, "that I have much to do. The government keeps me busy supplying medicines and unguents for the armies. In normal times," the good man continued, "I have, of course, less to do, but I am able to get along."

Mulek examined this article and that item, then lost himself in contemplation of an exquisite flower.

"Was it not your daughter who was here when last I was in?" The question was as casual as an inquiry about the state of the weather.

"Yes," replied Jacob, "it was my daughter Zorah."

"I do not see her here today."

"She is visiting my brother in the city of Mulek."

"You have two brothers in Mulek, do you not?"

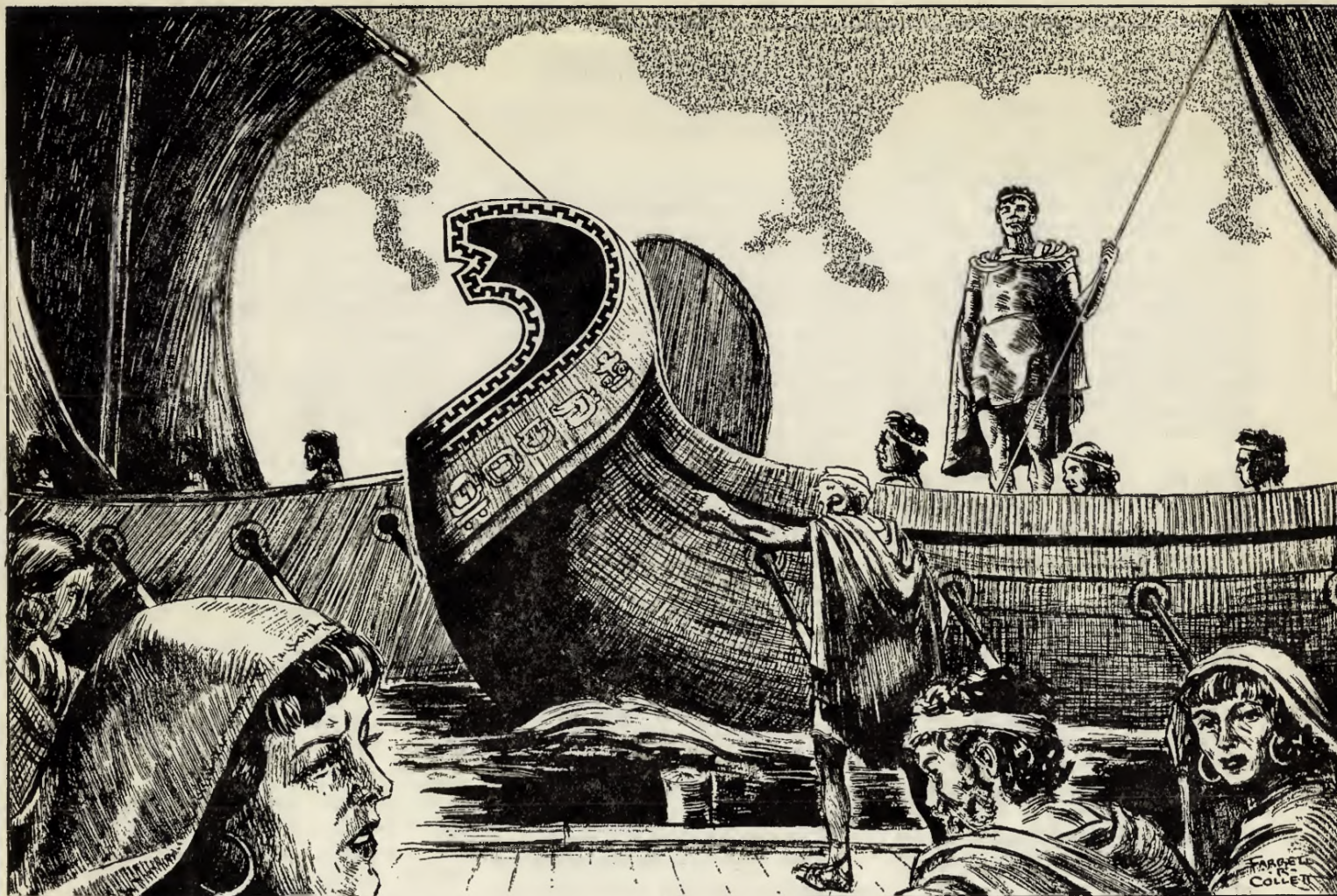
"But one, Amram, the boat-maker."

"You may sell me this flower, if you will."

And with that the interview ended.

As the day for the race drew near, there was in sporting circles talk of little else. It is true that most of the people were more deeply and immediately concerned with the presence of the Lamanites in the land, the approach of Amalickiah along the eastern coast. However, the more serious a people's situation, the greater is the need for some form of relaxation. Thus the interest in the forthcoming contest was widespread, more so than in times of peace, for there had been little diversion in recent months.

When the big day came, the river banks were lined with eager and excited people. From Zarahemla on the west side, and other cities even farther away, and from Gideon on the east they swarmed to the spot to see the entertainment. Rich and poor were there, soldier and civilian, men, women, and children. The princely sum staked on the race was alone sufficient to stimulate the interest of many who found nothing in the affair as a sporting event. For others it was holiday enough merely to see the way the more fortunate were decked out.



On the western bank, in the shade of a clump of fine trees, the seats were placed, and they were full. Other thousands of people lingered here and there, lining the river, swarming into the adjacent forest. Many were swimming or paddling about in small boats; others chatted, picnicked, or simply moved around while waiting for the big event of the day.

The race was to be run over a gleaming stretch of silent river, a straight piece of silver water moving slowly in the direction of the city of Mulek on the eastern coast. The distance was a half-day's journey for a Nephite, from the starting point to the finish line where the spectators were assembled.

In a favored place the elect were gathered, and in the midst of them, radiant and resplendent, was Sarah, fully justifying, in clothes of the brightness of the tropical birds, all the adulation she received. The crowd made a brilliant splotch of color against the dark background of the wilderness.

The boats were well matched.

Indeed, there was little to choose between them. Laban's was the newer and perhaps somewhat more trim, but Mulek was the more experienced sailor. Moreover, he knew every whim and caprice of his beauty.

Long before the spectators were able to distinguish one from the other, their interest began to mount. Shouts, cries, jibes, wagers, jeers, cheers, and promises were thrown about everywhere. The friends and backers of the contestants were loud and loyal, if not fair or considerate. It was a merry crowd.

FOR nearly an hour the boats glided gaily, now one ahead, now the other, often side by side if not nose to nose. At length they came into sight, breasting the lazy waves proudly. Mulek was in the lead. His gay colors proclaimed his identity. Laban, however, had some tricks held in reserve. No mean antagonist, when it began to look as if he were beaten, he began pushing forward. Faster and faster went the *Gull* till it seemed she was about to

take off on delicate wings into the air. In the midst of deafening applause and noisy cheering she took the lead and maintained it to the finish.

Then almost at once the thunderous acclaim died away. By contrast with the moment before, the one that followed was like the silence of death. The silence lasted only a moment, however, before it was gone in a tempest of conversation and speculation.

Every spectator was staring, doubting the evidence of his senses. Laban was suddenly forgotten; the *Gull* might as well not have existed. Mulek himself was for a moment quite unimportant, but his vessel was the object of every glance. Mulek was smiling and proud. He had lost his race and his ten thousand *senines*, but he had won his point and redeemed his pride. For on the damp sides of his beautiful boat there stood out, not the name *Sarah*, but *Zorah*.

In her place among the select ones, surrounded by thousands,

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MULEK OF ZARAHLEMA

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Sarah sat alone. Her face, at first scarlet with shame, became white, as the color drained from it, and drawn with pain. She simply sat, speechless, certain of what she saw, yet wholly unconvinced. Around her were her own people, now strangers all. In their faces were delight, incredulity, sardonic humor, and perhaps a measure of pity. There was little friendliness. When one played a game, one must take a chance. Sarah's heart was sick and desolate.

THE city of Mulek, on the eastern shore, at the mouth of the Sidon, was an old city; indeed, it was so old that it was almost wholly new. Its original structures of wood were nearly all gone, and new buildings of stone had taken their places till the city looked like a rich jewel, cut and polished.

One of the finest of its newer adornments was a palatial building, facing both the sea and the river. It was of white stone that reflected the restless water as the water mirrored the more substantial structure. It was one of the homes of Mulek of Zarahemla.

One day Mulek took up his residence there, with such servants as he would need for a short stay. He quickly became established.

In those days, following his contest with Laban, which was in reality the last episode in his contest with Sarah, Mulek was unsettled, disturbed in mind and restless in body. The pursuits to which he had been accustomed were now flavorless and seemingly without point. He tried many activities in an effort to find some of the zest he had formerly known, but he was not very successful. Nothing pleased him; nothing had charm; nothing seemed important. It was for this reason that he moved his establishment from Zarahemla to Mulek, as soon as he deemed it prudent to do so.

Early the next morning he presented himself at the factory of Amram, the boatmaker, his mind set on achieving two purposes with one visit.

Only a glance was sufficient to satisfy him that the man knew his business. Mulek was a master hand at his craft. Had he had nothing

more on his mind that morning, he would have enjoyed just looking about.

Amram was pleased with the name if not with the man. To have such a one for a customer was as good as to be made; it would be the beginning of a rush to his place. Even with the tide of government business, he could still use some good orders, and then, of course, the time would come again sooner or later when all this easy government money would be gone, when a man would have to rely again on himself in a competitive world.

"I desire a boat," the young man began, looking over models and stock.

"What sort of boat do you wish?"

"That, good sir, I do not know. I know only that it must be fast, faster than any other craft that ever sailed our waters."

"A fast boat," replied Amram, and he chuckled. Yes, it was true that Mulek did have need of a fast boat, one that would be faster, at any rate, than the one-time Sarah.

"Can you build such a vessel?"

"I have at my home the model of a boat that will run away from the wind."

"At your home?" Mulek warmed all over inside. "Have you ever built one like it?"

"Nay, young man. It is one of the things a man dreams about but never expects to see. There are few who can afford such a vessel as this."

"Let us go at once and see this marvel."

"If you can spare the time."

"My foremost interest," said Mulek, "is to get a boat. Time is not important."

The craftsman gave orders to his staff for the conduct of the business during his absence, and the two set off.

IT WAS not a long walk. Once inside Amram's house, while he kept his eyes roving all about the house, Mulek did not require any time at all to make up his mind about the boat. He gave an order at once, an order that threw the builder into ecstasy, not alone because of the amount of money involved, but also because of the joy he would derive from the executing of it.

Mulek seemed in no hurry to leave. He showed a sudden interest in furniture, and well he might since everything in the house had been made by the master himself. Mulek had never seen anything better. He passed from room to room, exclaiming over this article, examining that, praising still another. At last he found her.

Mulek started when he saw her and could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes. Was this self-possessed young woman the blushing girl of the herb shop? She appeared taller. Her complexion was clear; her features, exquisite; her feet, small and firmly planted; her hands, long and delicately tapering. It was like Mulek thus to anatomize; he was a specialist in such things.

She was beautiful! Moreover, she faced the world with the calm confidence of a mature person. Mulek was entranced and told himself, when at last he was able to think, that she was ravishing.

When they spoke courteously and distantly to each other, the man was the more confused. He who usually talked with such facility now discovered that his tongue could play him tricks.

He asked her a few commonplace questions. He reported her family as being well. He told of the prosperity of her father. He thanked Amram for his courteous attention. Then he escaped. It was nothing less than flight.

He had maneuvered rather well to see the girl once more, and now he was running away from her to collect his thoughts. Her direct and indifferent attitude toward him quite unmanned him. She had appeared not in the least impressed with either his name or his person.

Once more in command of himself, he felt a heightening of that expectancy he had experienced upon leaving her father's place a few days before, an expectancy that did much to restore his old-time enthusiasm, if not his old-time complacency.

In the quiet of his great house by the blue expanse of the sea Mulek set about the planning of one of the strangest courses he had ever planned, the winning of a woman.

Life was looking better once more.

(To be continued)