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Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter VII

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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 seventh part consists of chapter VII.

MULEK of Zarahemla

By J. N. WASHBURN

SYNOPSIS

MULEK loved Zarahemla, the city of his forefathers, where two factions were striving for power, one ruled by Amalickiah, a man of tremendous powers and winning manners, who had caused a rupture in the country, and Moroni, young chief captain of the armies of the Nephites, who went everywhere, encouraging, instructing, pleading with the people to unite in the country's defense. Accustomed to receiving the adulation of the people, Mulek was consumed with jealousy at his fall from favor. In order to call attention to himself he had mocked the priests of the church and allied himself with Amalickiah. Then, to win their praise he decided to support Moroni's projects. Mulek was eager to win the favor of the girl, Zorah, niece of Amram, a boatmaker. He devised ways of meeting her, but Zorah was too intent on the political unrest to be interested in him, and was lavish in her praise of Moroni, which added to Mulek's envy. Was he never to be free of this sense of his inferiority? But he determined in some way to win Zorah's approval. When, therefore, one of his friends approached him with the idea that he become king—even as his forefathers had been kings—he entertained the thought. A general election was called for and granted by Pahoran, chief judge, as to which kind of government was the more desirable. In the voting the king-men lost, at the very moment when Amalickiah led the Lamanites against the land. When the king-men were asked to support the government, they refused. Beside himself with worry, Pahoran sent word to Moroni, in the land of Bountiful to come posthaste to the defense of Zarahemla.

CHAPTER VII

MORONI, fearful of the outcome, did what a wise commander could do, and it was little enough. He left Teancum and Lehi in charge of matters in the east and went with all speed to the defense of the capital, to pull down the pride and the nobility of the king-men, as he put it.

Meanwhile the king-men were also busy. Pachus and Mulek set about gathering their forces and preparing their fortifications. Certainly they were not to be taken lightly. There were thousands of the king-men, and they were bitter and determined. Knowing they were to fight for their lives, they provided every advantage within their power. Nor did they lack for money, weapons, or food.

One evening word came that Moroni was marching on the city and would arrive next day with his

army. The king-men took up their position and waited the coming of the captain.

Mulek, fuming and fretting in the darkness, his dreams dead, his fine prospects, worse than gone, was literally hot with anger and mad with mortification and disappointment. To make things worse for him, his ultimate degradation, if it were to come at all, would come at the hands of Moroni whom he blamed for most of his troubles.

It was insupportable!

He felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to see a soldier standing in the darkness at his side.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A woman is waiting and wishes to speak with you," the other informed him.

"A woman?"

In surprise he followed the man through the streets to the extreme limit of the position occupied by Pachus' forces. There guards prevented the entrance of any of whom they were not sure. There the woman was waiting. Even though Mulek's eyes were accustomed to the dark, he could not for a moment guess at her identity, so closely was she veiled. Then he recognized her. It was Zorah!

FOR one brief instant all his heaviness left him. The weights fell from his shoulders; the lines left his brow. He felt an upsurge of pure happiness, of instant relief. He wanted to take her in his arms, but she was so still and unresponsive that he dared not touch her at first. At length he took her hand and found it cold as a stone.

"Zorah," he whispered, "is it really you? If there is any heaven, you stand at the door of it." For a moment she did not speak but at last found her voice.

"What mad thing is this you do, Mulek?" she cried. "What utterly mad thing? Do you not know that it is not death alone you invite but

dishonor and loss of all hopes and prospects? Oh, I could not have believed it of you." She turned her head so that the tears fell upon her sleeve like drops of rain.

Mulek was overcome. But whether he would have told her that all he had done had been done for her, he was never to know. Whether he would even then have turned back had she asked, it was likewise not to be determined. What more either might have said could not be known, for at that moment the girl, overwhelmed, withdrew.

"Good-bye, Mulek," she said and was gone, as she had come, alone, in the darkened street.

For a moment Mulek stood, quite without volition or command. When in the end he realized that she was gone, he knew the full weight of despair and hopelessness. His strong shoulders shook with sobs; and hot tears, unheeded, rushed in a torrent down his face. For the first time in his life he was utterly alone and poignantly aware of his loneliness.

MORONI reached the capital in a towering rage. Had it not been for this, he would have faced the king-men under even greater difficulties than those under which he already labored, for with all the earnestness of his heart he hated having to destroy his own people. Only the depth of their wrong could avail to make him forget that inborn reluctance.

As it was, he fought as he had never fought before. He threw his forces against those of Pachus with all the strength he had. Pachus for his part had the advantage of position but lacked the moral support of a righteous cause.

With terrible slaughter the conflict moved back and forth with first one side winning and then the other. From house to house they fought, and from street to street. The



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wounded and dead lay everywhere; cries of the sufferers made the day hideous; and the city and its environs, red with intermingled blood of rebel and patriot alike. Brothers, fathers, and sons became enemies within an hour and lashed and struggled powerfully to destroy each other.

Pachus went everywhere, encouraging his men, pushing them to furious efforts with his praise. He kept up their flagging hopes with new promises manufactured on the spot. Neither truth nor logic had any part in his words, but he gave ample proof of his earnestness in the fury and efficiency with which he struck.

"Come, friends, patriots all," he would shout to any he saw faltering, "we bear the burden of the oppressed. Will you have your children grow up slaves?" There was nothing within his power that he did not offer and deliver on that fateful day.

Moroni, too, was like a fountain from which sprang rich streams of strength. He performed surpassing deeds of valor and of wisdom. Thrilled by his unexampled courage, astounded at his strength in time of

need, his men outdid themselves in feats of greatness.

"For the oppressed!" the traitors would shout. "For the fatherland!" the defenders would answer, and in this way they distinguished each the other, for they fought every man for himself when, how, and where he would. There was little organization; each man was his own commander and command.

Such slashing and screaming as there were! Swords and shields, spears and arrowheads reflected the sunshine until stained to the point where they shed nothing but ruddy drops like rain upon the sodden earth.

Before nightfall one might have said that death had painted a picture and called it "Desolation."

Mulek and his expert blade were known far and near. He was like a mechanical device, as dispassionate, as unrelenting. He had forgotten how to think. In slaughter he found the only release for the tempest of his soul. For hours he persisted. In spite of wishing to lose his life, in spite of inviting the strokes of every weapon, in spite of being in the thick of the unspeakable fray from

beginning to end, he was preserved as by a miracle.

The sun rose higher and higher and seemed somehow to govern the fighting, for with it at its zenith the action reached its highest point and began to wane with the lengthening shadows. The king-men, by then aware of the hopelessness of their cause, started to desert or go over to the enemy.

Moroni, heartened wonderfully by these defections, after a period when he had begun to fear his battle was in vain, called upon his last resources and asked his men for renewed efforts. And they responded nobly with such a burst of vigor as took the remaining spirit out of the rebels. These, in ever-increasing numbers, laid down their weapons and begged only for rest.

Mulek fought to the end—the last to quit—a giant of destruction! Even Moroni could not refrain from expressing admiration for his skill and strength even while he deplored their having been thrown away in a project of anarchy. Weary as night, senseless as a stone, Mulek, under heavy guard, was dragged off to a cold and lonely cell.

(To be continued)