

# MASKED ROBBER SERIES

1. THE MASKED ROBBER



**GERRIE RADLOF**

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# THE MASKED ROBBER

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## **The Masked Robber Series**

The cover sketch has been specially designed to match the theme of the Masked Robber series. It is a new creation for the cover of the book. This book is available in e-book format for the first time.

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**THE MASKED ROBBER**  
by Gerrie Radlof

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## SUMMARY

“The Masked Robber” by Gerrie Radlof is the first book in an exciting historical fiction series depicting the politics and social tensions of 19<sup>th</sup>-century South African colonial life. The story follows the adventures of the mysterious Masked Robber, a daring outlaw who leads a band of loyal followers as they fight injustice in the Cape Colony.

In this first book of the Masked Robber series, we are introduced to the legendary Masked Robber alias Jean de Moreaux, as he dramatically appears one night to confront his arch-nemesis and cousin, the wealthy nobleman Count Paul de Moreaux. A tense rivalry exists between these two men, linked to a murky crime in their pasts in England that ruined the Masked Robber’s fortunes. De Moreaux has accused the Masked Robber of a terrible murder, leading to his exile. But who is telling the truth? The robber’s identity remains cloaked in secrecy as he defiantly harasses officials of the British government. To some he is a romantic hero, stealing from the rich to give to the poor like a modern Robin Hood. To others, he is a dangerous menace. Rumors swirl about his origins and motives. The story follows several intertwining plot threads centered around the Masked Robber. Young Willa Rossouw finds herself enthralled by both the Masked Robber and Paul de Moreaux after encounters with each of them, not realizing their real connection. She must navigate her feelings as she uncovers secrets that overturn her perceptions.

Meanwhile, Willa’s younger sister Elmien falls madly in love with the Masked Robber’s loyal lieutenant Jacques, complicating matters. As Willa and Elmien become more intertwined with the Masked Robber’s fate, they struggle to reconcile their feelings and relationships. Yet Elmien remains determined to uncover the truth and to clear the reputations of those she cares about. So when Paul eventually succeeds in capturing the Masked Robber, Jacques concocts a daring plan to break Jean out of the Castle’s jail to save his friends from Paul’s wrath. On the eve of Jean’s scheduled execution, Jacques, Elmien, and Willa orchestrate a stunning jailbreak. But Paul lurks in the shadows, obsession turning him into a dangerous madman. He recaptures Jean and a climactic duel erupts between the cousins. With Paul’s demise,

Jean and Jacques finally have a chance at freedom and true love. But the past haunts Jean, who pushes Willa away, convinced she could never really love him. Heartbroken, Willa disappears to a convent. Only when Jean learns the extent of her sacrifice does he race to find her. This first book in The Masked Robber series sets the stage for the continuing adventures to come. Radlof immerses the readers on a thrilling ride through exotic South Africa, filled with beauty, injustice, love, and the potential for redemption against the odds. “The Masked Robber” book offers a satisfying story that stands alone yet leaves you eager to unravel more of this mysterious anti-hero’s exploits across the remaining books. For those seeking a thrilling historical fiction tale, full of drama, action, suspense, and romance, “The Masked Robber” sets the stage for a memorable journey. Rich in atmosphere and with vibrant characters and evocative descriptions, Gerrie Radlof spins a classic tale of mystery, revenge, and the redemptive power of love. This e-book’s satisfying conclusion neatly resolves the twists and turns, delivering hard-won happiness for its star-crossed lovers as it transports readers to a long-ago, nearly-forgotten era of chivalry and adventure. But at its core, this is a timeless tale of good versus evil, justice versus corruption, and freedom versus oppression.

## EXTRACT

Without thinking, Jean jumps off the wall and passes Paul. He moves so quickly that Paul barely has time to turn around before Jean is practically standing behind him. Jean does not understand what happened. It may have been a reflexive movement when he blocked the blow because his mind realized that the sword would pierce him and his arm automatically reacted. But it feels like something outside himself has moved his arm involuntarily. And as he moves, he quickly glances at Willa again. Her eyes are open and show relief and admiration. He suddenly decides not to die anymore. He has thought too many times about the strange ways of fate to wonder any longer about the remarkable nature of his escape. Maybe there is something like predestination, something that decides the day of your death, and even if you decide what, you cannot overturn that determination. If it has been decided that you will not die today, you will not die, even if you put a gun barrel against your head. He will live, but he will not take Paul's life.

# 1. THE MASKED ROBBER

## CHAPTER 1

It is a sunny morning in the spring of 1833. There are signs of unusual hurry and excited activity in the oak lanes of Stellenbosch. It is teeming with people, like on a night meal. But the quiet, stately atmosphere is not present. On the contrary, the people run back and forth, shout impatiently at each other and everyone tries to reach the big square in the middle of the village as quickly as possible.

In the midst of this crowd, two horse riders ride calmly down one of the streets at a comfortable pace.

And yet, if there was someone among the crowd who was a horse connoisseur and who had given himself time to pay attention to others, he would notice that the two riders' horses are sweaty. The beautiful animals, the jet-black mane, and the chestnut's breathing are nevertheless slow and regular and the connoisseur would know that they had been given a chance to relax outside the village.

One man turns to the other and although his face maintains the calm features, he speaks with tension in his voice.

"I wonder if it is wise to expose ourselves so confidently to the public."

"Do not worry, Jacques," the other replies with a laugh that he uses to try to rid the unrest. "Everyone is so excited that they do not pay attention to anyone. Just speak English or Dutch then you will not attract attention."

"Someone may recognize us," his friend persists and he wanders his eyes over the crowd.

The other young man laughs again.

"With this beard," he says and strokes the month-old beard on his cheeks and knows with his hand. "Come on, Jacques. We were last in this country months ago and even then nobody noticed us with an eye. Maybe from a distance or in the twilight when there was still enough light. But it is still doubtful whether the individuals who had that privilege will be present today."

"Yet, Jean, the principle is wrong. We have always worked in the dark or with masks on and we have avoided all villages and farms. Your own opinion was that we would be safer as long as we were never seen.

"I know," answers the one called Jean, "but forget that now. Since we

learned to speak Dutch, we get along better because we can talk to any stranger. Today is an exception in any case. We appear in public with wild beards that we shall shave off tonight, and no one will ever dream that it is us who were here among them. Or would you prefer to hide your beautiful face forever behind that thicket?"

Jacques just sighs. But his attitude is more relaxed when he looks at the people and he no longer avoids the gaze of the few who accidentally catch his eye.

"You have an answer for everything," he says with a gesture indicating that he would have followed his friend anyway, even if he had not had an answer. "I still think we are taking too much of a risk."

"To take risks has become our life. No, Jacques, I cannot share your caution." He laughs again. "I feel today as if I am in high spirits like a child who after years of absence returns to his parents' home. When was the last time we were among people? I think it is been all the months that I have had to stick to your face and that of Andre and Pierre and the others. Today we move freely among a crowd and we see faces, hundreds of faces, old and young, tall and round, flat noses and crooked noses..."

"Your enthusiasm is not contagious," Jacques interrupts him laughing, while he self-consciously touches his prominent but noble nose. "It is not too crooked," he says.

Jean now laughs heartily.

"No to worry," he continues, "I do not think we are taking too much of a risk. This undertaking is not characteristic of our everyday activities, but we will all find it enjoyable and varied. And just because it is so extraordinary, people will not associate today's events with us personally. Come on, Jacques, we will get off here by the shop. We have to ascertain that the information we have is completely accurate. Judging by the crowds in the town, it cannot really be wrong."

They keep their horses in front of a shop along the street. The shopkeeper leans against one of the veranda poles and calls out to a familiar person passing by in the street.

"Take a belt and hang him!" he advises a hurried young man.

But before he can answer, another calls out. "You need two belts. One for the judge!"



A few people laugh when they hear these words, but the ominous sound in them can be clearly felt. The two young riders have tied their horses to the crossbar and are approaching the shopkeeper.

“Good morning,” Jean greets kindly. “Who are the poor devils who have come among this crowd in misfortune?”

The man greets them back but looks surprised that they are so ignorant. He looks at the two strangers slowly and carefully. Despite the ruddy beard, he can see that they are young and the dust on their clothes indicates that they have travelled far.

“You come from far away,” he asks, without answering the question.

Jean nods.

“As far as the East Coast, and beyond. We are going to Cape Town.”

“Then you must be thirsty. I serve coffee inside.” They follow him inside and after enjoying a few sips of coffee, Jean continues.

“You will understand that we are not up to date. It looks like communion in the middle of the week here and everyone is crowding together in the street.”

The shopkeeper pulls a chair closer.

“The travelling court has been sitting here for a few days now,” he says. “But is it so sensational?”

“No, just one case being heard today. Wynand Rabie against that scoundrel Jan Gambas.” The shopkeeper loses the composure he has so far maintained and it is as if this topic also excites him, which can be sensed by the crowd outside. “Since Philip passed Ordinance No. 50, the Hottentots do whatever they want. They do not want to work anywhere and just wander around where they want to steal and drink, so no honest citizen is safe anymore. They are our equals now, says Ordinance Number Fifty,” and the storekeeper spits three times.

Jean smiles at the man’s outraged anger that has suddenly flared up. But he shudders when he thinks about how the dissatisfaction of the crowd on the square could just as easily be driven to a climax, and he wonders what will happen then. “It is a regrettable state of affairs,” he says, “but in regard to this Wynand...?”

“As I told you,” the storekeeper interrupts him, “Rabie encountered the Hottentot on his farm and told him to leave. But Gambas was stubborn and Rabie gave him a thrashing. And if that scum,” and he wants to spit

again but shows mercy on his floor, “if that Gambas does not then run straight to Philip as if he is his father.” The storekeeper takes a pull on his pipe. “I do wonder,” he says thoughtfully, “perhaps he is...”

Jean laughs again.

“And then?” he asks.

“Well, that is all,” the man says when he realizes he cannot start a discussion. “Rabie is appearing in court today. But the judge will have to tread in his footsteps or he and Gambas will both be hanged. The whole district is here, people from far and wide.”

“The judge will surely ensure that he is protected,” mentioned Jean. “I have not seen any troops around here yet. And that is the only thing that will save him. Has the case already begun?”

“No, friend, it is still early. Probably in about half an hour.”

“We would like to go and listen to it,” Jean says.

“Then you will have to hurry. There will not be room for even a mouse in the court.”

They pay for the coffee and leave. The storekeeper follows them to the door.

“I wanted to inquire about the Eastern Border,” he says. “News travels so slowly.”

“Things are just scraping by,” Jean replies, “but we will come back this way and tell you.”

The two young men comfortably swing themselves onto their horses and gallop down the street.

“Well,” said Jacques, “we heard correct and we also just arrived in time here.”

“What did you arrange with Andre and Pierre?”

“They are surely already here in front of us on the square. The others are waiting outside the village.”

They carefully guide their horses through the crowd on the square in front of the courthouse. There is a noise that rises from the crowd like the hum of a swarm of bees, and Jean wonders again what would happen if someone threw a rock among them.

“Perhaps there is still a seat or standing room inside,” he says. “These people seem to prefer the outdoors.”

“Andre and the others are at the main entrance!” Jacques exclaims.

They dismount and lead the horses more easily through the crowd. In front of the door, they meet two men with bushy beards like their own, who are also standing there with their horses.

“Where are the others, Andre?” Jean asks one of the two men.

He begins to answer in French.

“Speak English!” Jacques hurriedly orders while he looks at the groups of people nearest to them.

Jean laughs.

“Still nervous, Jacques?” he asks.

“Just careful.”

“Outside the village, Count,” answers the one called Andre.

“Forget the Count, Andre!” Jacques impatiently requests.

“Look, monsieur Jacques,” begins Andre, who stubbornly refuses to be contradicted. It is clear that he is much older than the two friends, but that he is on a fatherly and intimate footing with them, although he is subordinate to them. “Let me finish the sentence, please! The others are waiting outside the village where we left them, Count!” And he looks threateningly at Jacques.

Jean laughs.

“Alright,” he says. “Hold my horse, Andre, and wait here.”

He walks away from them to the corner of the large building where the court is in session. He surveys the surroundings of the square and the building itself and chats for a moment with a few farmers who are standing around him before re-joining his friends.

“Come on, Jacques,” he says.

They climb up to the third step leading to the entrance of the court. In front of the door itself stand two soldiers who open the door for those entering and exiting. The two friends turn around so that they are facing the soldiers with their backs to the crowd and can look out over the square.

From the steps, they can easily see over the heads of the crowd.

Jean explains his observations to his friend. As far as he can tell, there are only two doors in the building, the front door and a side door, both guarded by two soldiers. The side door is in a passageway on the right side of the building and provides access to two rooms behind the courtroom.

“So there are only four guards,” he continues. “Two at each door. That surprises me. I expected the judge to have a troop at hand in case this crowd became rebellious.”

“I think you are mistaken, Jean,” Jacques interjected. “Look at that row of horses there in front of the building diagonally to the left across the square.”

“Yes indeed!” Jean agreed. “And look at the top window! You can unmistakably see the buttons of his uniform through the windows shining.” Well, well, well, he thinks, running his hand over his beard. This “little judge” is more awake than we think. That house is full of soldiers and he probably has a whole regiment hidden around here. He suddenly laughs. “Well!” he says, “that just makes things more interesting!”

He leans closer to his friend. “Suppose now you wanted to rescue someone from the claws of the court,” he whispers, “would not you slip into that passageway and overpower the two soldiers? And your clothes are so dirty and full of dust, Jacques, that you really cannot appear in court like that. I would advise you to put on one of the little soldier’s clothes before you put a gun to the little judge’s head.”

Jacques also smiles, as he is accustomed to these concise orders. “And where are you?” he asks.

“I will be inside and will give you the signal.”

After a while, Jacques returns to Andre and Pierre where they are still waiting with the horses. He gives a few short orders and then Pierre pushes through the crowd to the street where the two riders came earlier. While Jacques is watching the horses, Andre joins Jean, where he is standing on the steps.

“You are the oldest of us, Andre,” Jean says with a soft expression in his eyes. “I am placing you in the most dangerous position this morning. You know more or less what our plans are. The execution of them will largely be controlled by circumstances and everyone should use their discrete judgement. Go inside now and sit as far forward in the court as you can find an open seat. Then you wait for the developments of affairs. It will go well with you, my faithful friend,” and Jean affectionately squeezed the old man’s arm.

Without further ado, Andre goes up the stairs and disappears through

the large wooden door that the soldier holds open for him. Jean looks over the crowd again and nods to Jacques where he stands by the horses. Then he turns to go inside as well.

As he moves, he lightly bumps into an elderly farmer who was following him. He stands politely upright.

“Sorry, friend,” says the old boss and his bright eyes look for a moment at the young man. They are friendly and deep. But Jean does not notice it, because at that same instant, the young lady who apparently walks with the farmer along the stairs, also looks at him. And Jean is suddenly aware of the most wonderful feeling, like water on a thirsty throat or shade in a scorching desert. He has never seen anything more stunning or more beautiful before.

But the moment is so fleeting that her image is already vague when he goes inside behind them through the large door.

Inside the hall is packed with people from wall to wall. There is a soft murmur of voices, but it is muffled and uncertain and a feeling of nervousness overcomes everyone when he enters.

At the very back of the hall, a few empty seats can still be found here and there. The farmer and the girl walk towards three empty places next to each other in the second row from the back. Jean follows them and sits on the third seat. He wants to look at the girl again but restrains himself because she is sitting on the other side of the man. He decides to rather pay attention to the inside of the building since he will soon need the knowledge.

The judge’s chair itself is located on a platform against the back wall of the courtroom. Between the judge’s chair and the bars that separate the public, the jury box is on the right side and the partition for the accused is on the left side. There are also desks for the officials, the Attorney General, and the lawyers and attorneys who defend the case. To the left and right of the judge’s chair is a door in the wall leading to the two rooms behind the hall. He prays that there are no soldiers hiding in the rooms in case of unrest in the court because then their attempt will fail and Jacques will not come out unscathed.

The elderly farmer next to him catches his attention by touching his arm.

“Excuse me, friend,” he says, “but do you perhaps know when they will

start?”

Jean shakes his head.

“I just arrived,” he replies. “And I just followed the crowd.”

“Are you from far away?” The bright eyes quickly glance at the dust on the young man’s riding pants and leather vest, but the friendliness in his voice takes away all cheap curiosity. Jean has already made several acquaintances with the farming community and he knows that interest in your personal affairs is common among them. Because there is nothing in their honest and sincere lives that they need to hide, they do not harbor the suspicion that there are things that another would prefer to keep secret. What further strikes this farmer about Jean is that he apparently does not share in the general excitement, as if there is something greater and stronger within him that is not affected by such worldly matters, and which also allows him to pay attention to the man next to him.

Therefore, he replies equally friendly.

“From the East Border, Sir.”

“That is far, friend.”

“It is.”

“And you came here to listen to the Rabie case?”

“Well,” Jean hesitates because the question is difficult. “I am travelling further,” he says evasively.

“Then you are a stranger here?”

“Yes, Sir.”

The farmer extends his hand.

“Rossouw is my name, friend,” he says. “They call me Uncle Francois.” Jean hesitates again while he takes the hand. He will have to provide his name, another name.

“Ben...” he says then. “Ben Rabie, from Cradock.”

“Family of Wynand?”

“No... uncle. Do you know him personally?”

Uncle Francois leans back slightly in his chair. “I know him well,” he says while looking in front of him, “quite well. He is a dear innocent young man. But you know how circumstances are, you cannot always control your mood with the Hottentots. I always try to be diplomatic, but the younger boys have hot blood. They get easily upset and then do

the wrong thing. Moreover, they are too stubborn to listen to our older people.”

“So uncle thinks Rabie will get his deserved punishment today?”

“Never, friend? Along with all these people I stand firmly behind Rabie. I just mean that something like this would not happen on my farm, I try to keep the peace. No, Rabie did the right thing. The Hottentots who treated him so casually should be punished.”

“And now,” says Jean, “Rabie is the one that must be punished?”

“Yes, it is a done deal against him.”

“What does Uncle think his sentence will be?”

“It is truly difficult to say. To me, it seems that Dr. Philip wants to make an example of this offense against his doctrine and you will know that he has a lot of influence. Do you know the judge?”

“No, uncle,” Jean answers.

“A rough Englishman and a loyal follower of Philip. I understand that he has already caused a lot of resentment with his unreasonable statements in the past few days. The people’s feelings have been stirred up and this case has been the only topic of conversation in the county for weeks. Everyone is tense and now just waiting to see what will happen, and if the verdict does not meet their approval, I am afraid of the consequences. It is a shame that there has to be always strife and disagreement in our young country when everyone can live together in love.” He sighs deeply and says. “That is also why I should rather leave one of these days.”

For a moment they sit quietly. Then the old man continues chatting.

“Yes, I just do not like these things. You will never find me in court either. Since they abolished the homelands, I do not agree with the legal system anymore. But now you know how women are, mine is the same. Look, Francois, Hannie told me last week that you should go listen to Wynand’s case. We are going to Cape Town anyway and it is on our way. Maybe you can put in a good word for him.”

Uncle Francois quietly laughs. “As if I can stand up and tell the judge what to do. And when my daughter...” he hesitates as he leans closer. When she heard the conversation, she now wants to come along and watch it too. I told her it is not proper for young ladies to sit around in courtrooms because that is where all the gossip starts. But these days,