

MASKED ROBBER SERIES

8. THE MASKED ROBBER KEEPS WATCH



GERRIE RADLOF

Translated by Pieter Haasbroek

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by
GERRIE RADLOF

and

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PIETER HAASBROEK

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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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SUMMARY

Step into the tension-filled streets of the Cape Colony during the early 19th century, where secrets, power struggles, and the pursuit of justice collide in Gerrie Radlof's thrilling eighth installment of The Masked Robber series - The Masked Robber Keeps Watch.

Sir Jeffrey Hamilton, newly appointed Chief Justice of the Cape of Good Hope, finds his authority tested when he receives a cryptic letter from a notorious figure whose name inspires both fear and admiration - the Masked Robber. The letter's ominous tone is clear, injustice will not be tolerated, and violence awaits if Sir Jeffrey fails to deliver a fair judgment in the trial of a young farmer accused of defying unjust colonial trade laws. What begins as a seemingly trivial legal case quickly escalates into a battle of wits and courage, with the Masked Robber orchestrating events from the shadows. The novel takes readers deep into the political and social fabric of the Cape Colony, where a corrupt Governor manipulates laws for personal gain, and unrest brews among the citizens. Amid this turmoil, the enigmatic Masked Robber emerges as a champion of the oppressed, risking everything to challenge the establishment. His methods are unorthodox, his identity shrouded in mystery, but his cause resonates with a growing wave of dissent. Who is this daring figure? And what drives him to stand against such formidable foes?

As Sir Jeffrey navigates the complexities of colonial politics and his growing fear of the Masked Robber, another unexpected ally enters the scene, Dennis Atterbury, a suave and enigmatic visitor from London. Together, they must grapple with threats, moral dilemmas, and their own convictions as they try to untangle the web of intrigue surrounding the Masked Robber's plans. Full of suspense, action, and historical detail, The Masked Robber Keeps Watch invites readers to explore themes of justice, loyalty, and the resilience of the human spirit. With its vivid depiction of Cape Dutch society, richly drawn characters, and edge-of-your-seat drama, this installment is a must-read for fans of

historical fiction, action-packed adventures, and stories that delve into the power dynamics of an era.

Will justice prevail? Can the Masked Robber's daring gambit bring hope to the oppressed, or will it end in catastrophe? The answers await in this gripping chapter of Gerrie Radlof's iconic series. Don't miss your chance to discover the truth behind this legend and purchase your copy today!

EXTRACT

Over the white sand near the water's edge, the clatter of horses' hooves cannot be heard. Nor are their black figures visible against the dark backdrop of the sea.

But they clearly see the rider as he races closer at full speed. A moment later, the call of a night owl echoes, and then Phillip is with them.

"They are coming fast, monsieur!" he exclaims. "They are already coming along the beach."

"We could have expected that," says Jean. "Their attack is, of course, finely planned. They will storm the gate after the two who entered the Castle have had enough time to reach the cells. While the battle then rages in front of the Castle, a mock battle, of course, the prisoners escape over the back wall."

"But then the two will be intercepted, Jean. We will have to reach them." Jacques sounds anxious. "And in the meantime, the citizens will be breaking loose." He laughs. "An hour ago we were sitting with our hands folded, doing nothing. And now we won't know where to start first."

8. THE MASKED ROBBER KEEPS WATCH

CHAPTER 1

“Harness my carriage.” Sir Jeffrey Hamilton, Chief Justice of the Cape of Good Hope, barely glances at the servant who entered shortly after he rang the silver bell on the desk in his grand study. While the servant bows and leaves to fulfill the Chief Justice’s request, Sir Jeffrey’s gaze flicks to the black hands of the standing clock on the wall. Half-past eight. It is not yet too late to pay a visit to the Governor.

His eyes are drawn back to the piece of paper lightly moving between his fingers. Once again, he reads every word written on it in bold, childlike handwriting.

“We know how important this small matter is, as you supposedly make the judgment alone. But Francois is innocent, your judgment must recognize that, or else, my friend, violence follows and a judge, a government hero, will die!

The Masked Robber”

Ridiculous! Nonsensical rhyming. The babbling of a child. Yet Sir Jeffrey stands up. Nervously, he rubs his hands together and takes a step across the soft carpet. On his way back to the desk, his gaze wanders back to the piece of paper. It is as if he cannot tear his eyes away from it.

The Masked Robber! A foolish name! He has heard of the Masked Robber stories, silly stories! No rational person would attach any value to them.

Why he actually wants to speak to the Governor now, he does not know. He should throw the note in the wastebasket and forget about it.

What bothers him then? Is it fear of the threat in the rhyme? Or is it perhaps the insight, the true deductions, the conciseness and profound meaning of each sentence?

Sir Jeffrey was appointed Chief Justice of the Cape just a few months ago. Until now, it has been simple to accept and cooperate with the Governor’s policies and give judgments according to the law, the instructions of the Colonial Secretary in London, the Governor’s power

in the Colony, and sometimes according to Sir Jeffrey's own judgment. Suddenly, it seems that the matter is no longer simple. The charges against the Swartland farmer, Francois Venter, are indeed small. Venter sold a few bags of wheat to the visiting ship's officer a day after the ship arrived in Table Bay. Surely, nothing to make a fuss about. But His Excellency, the Governor, issued a rule a year or so ago, after buying several large grain farms in the Swartland, saying that no citizens may go to the officers of visiting ships to sell their products until the ship has been in the bay for a full two days. The Governor gave reasons for the rule, but it did not take much to realize that it gave him the chance to show his own products to the visiting sailors first.

And it is clearly laid out in the rhyme. It is a small matter that is important as far as His Excellency's interests are concerned.

And then, in the second line of the rhyme, it is clearly stated that the fact that Sir Jeffrey alone will give a verdict is proof of the importance that the Governor attaches to the matter. Furthermore, it is clear that the writer is aware that the verdict is already decided.

Afterwards, this Masked Robber presents his case. Francois is undoubtedly innocent, which means that the Masked Robber does not agree with the Governor's rules.

He requests, no, he commands Sir Jeffrey to acquit Venter, or else the Chief Judge will die a violent death! And that last remark, "government hero." How openly the Masked Robber expresses his opinion.

The Chief Judge is a puppet of the Governor. His Excellency dictates the judgments he must make in court.

The blood rushes to the Chief Judge's thin face. The sides of his hooked nose flare with anger, and his pointed head moves on his vulture-like neck.

Such boldness! Such threats! If only this Masked Robber could be caught, he would receive a death sentence based on the writings.

But who is the Masked Robber? He has never believed the nonsense about the mysterious, almost legendary bush robber. And yet, are these letters real evidence of his existence? Or is it the attempt of a naive friend of Francois Venter to scare Sir Jeffrey Hamilton?

But whoever it may be, how will Sir Jeffrey know that they will not carry out the threat? Already, for many other reasons, there is great

dissatisfaction in the Colony. He has heard many rumors that people are unhappy with the government and the Governor's behavior. How well does Sir Jeffrey realize that it only takes a small spark to set a pile of dry wood on fire. And the punishment he will give to Francois Venter tomorrow may be the necessary spark for the built-up discontent that has been piling up for months.

There is a light, polite knock on the door. Sir Jeffrey picks up the letters from the desk and steps out quickly. The servant bows.

"The carriage is ready, Sir Jeffrey."

The Chief Judge does not answer. In the large pocket of his three-quarter satin jacket, the fingers of his right hand hold the piece of paper. His sharp eyes stare blankly ahead, and lost in his thoughts, he shakes lightly in the well-sprung vehicle as it rattles along the gardens and over the cobblestones of Heerengracht until the sound echoes in the Castle gate and the carriage stops in front of the Court.

The door porter bows low. In all levels of society, there is awe, even fear, of the people of justice. Even if your actions towards any of your fellow humans are ever so wrong, they can still drag you before the law. It will decide your fate, and so it is best to show respect for the judges, especially if it is the highest of them all, Sir Jeffrey Hamilton.

His Excellency relaxes in his private sitting room. Silver items cast bright reflections of the large chandeliers in the Chief Judge's eyes.

"Ah, Sir Jeffrey!" exclaims the Governor happily. The Chief Justice makes a slight bow. Then his sharp gaze flashes to the young man who leans back comfortably among the soft cushions of a couch.

"Oh, yes," continues His Excellency. "You have not met each other yet. Sir Jeffrey, this is Dennis Atterbury from London. He is visiting us for a while."

The young man stands up. His movements are almost bored, but he quickly straightens himself. His posture is proud but relaxed, like that of a high nobleman. That he was raised in the best circles and used to the finest society is obvious.

His gaze is very direct, almost too much. But the smile on his full lips is gentle, polite, and somewhat formal.

"Pleased to meet you." His voice is deep and calm.

Sir Jeffrey nods. For the first time, His Excellency realizes that the

Chief Justice is tense. His gaze is slightly disapproving, as if he wants to make the others understand that it is not the proper way to greet friends of the Governor.

“I need to speak to you urgently, Your Excellency,” says Sir Jeffrey, not paying attention to the other’s expression.

“That is unexpected,” remarks the Governor dryly. “Dennis was about to share the latest news from Europe with me.”

“I apologize, Your Excellency,” Sir Jeffrey continues. “It is something I must bring to your attention.”

The Governor stifles a yawn but looks apologetically at the young man.

“Of course, Your Excellency.” Dennis Atterbury bows from the waist. He glances once at the Chief Justice. “You will excuse me,” he says with a touch of sarcasm as he leaves.

“What is it, Jeffrey?” asks His Excellency irritably once they are alone.

“This!” With the single word, the Chief Justice places the Anonymous Letter in the Governor’s hand. “It landed on my desk tonight.”

The Governor does not respond. He starts reading. A smile forms on his lips, but then his gaze stiffens. He looks up, a bit confused.

“The Anonymous!” he exclaims. The next moment, his face relaxes. He laughs. “Does it bother you?” he asks casually. He tosses the piece of paper onto the table in front of him. “It is most likely a friend of that dull Venter trying to scare you.”

“It could be, Your Excellency,” Sir Jeffrey replies, as the Governor’s lack of concern bothers him. “On the other hand, this Anonymous might actually exist and...”

“He did exist, Jeffrey,” interrupts the Governor, pouring a second cup of tea for himself. “Tea?” he asks.

“According to what I have heard, he acted quite effectively in the past,” says the Chief Justice, ignoring the Governor’s question. “Nowhere in the rumors is it reported that the Anonymous has been caught.”

“You surely do not mean to suggest that you believe those stories!” The Governor looks surprised, but it is as if he does not want to take the matter seriously. “A highway robber, Jeffrey. A Masked Robber from the legal system. There was not much law and order before I came here. Today, such things will not happen again.”

“The fact remains, Excellency,” and Sir Jeffrey tries to remain calm,

“that the citizens are unhappy. Many complaints have already been made. It is...”

“It is unlikely that anyone would be foolish enough to risk his life for a few bags of wheat!”

“A spark needs to be lit to set a haystack on fire, Excellency.”

“But for such a silly incident!?”

“In their opinion, it is not.”

The Governor becomes restless. The smile has disappeared. He stares at the other with a slight smirk.

“Do you consider it unfair that I have the privilege of trading with visiting ships first, I, the man responsible for the success of the Colony! Do I not have the right to pick the best products?”

“I did not say that, Excellency.” Sir Jeffrey does not let himself be stopped. “It is also not what we are discussing. Currently, it is the view of the farming community that matters. And as I understand it, this Masked Robber has repeatedly sided with them, acting as their champion. He has...”

“Nonsense!” With an impatient gesture, the Governor grabs the letters off the table. He tears them into tiny pieces and throws them into the fireplace. Sir Jeffrey’s eyes follow the swirling pieces until the last one lands on the glowing embers and curls up, catching fire moments later. Then the Governor laughs. He approaches and pats the Chief Justice on the shoulder.

“A hundred men from the army will be present at the court session,” he promises. “The building will be guarded from early on. Make your judgment without worry. Afterwards, as soon as our countryside friends have learned their lesson and calmed down, you will have a personal guard day and night.”

Sir Jeffrey is not happy at all. The Governor has turned his back on him and picked up his cup of tea. As far as he is concerned, the matter is settled.

The Chief Justice clenches his fists. The other man’s attitude seems completely unreasonable to him. It is not his life that is at risk. He offers the protection of the troops as if he were giving a child’s wish.

“Excellency,” says Sir Jeffrey carefully, “do you not think we should rather give Venter a light warning?”

The Governor quickly turns around like lightning. He looks at the other as if he has committed a serious crime.

“And let such boldness succeed!” he yells. “It was a deliberate act, Jeffrey. Do you understand? Francois Venter must be taught a lesson, him and his whole group of troublemakers!”

“Excellency...”

“You are getting upset for nothing, Jeffrey.” The Governor’s mood has calmed down as quickly as it started. “Does it fit our status to give in to such a, such a silly threat? We will not be able to look anyone in the eye again.” He points to the ash in the hearth. “Forget it. Do not report it to anyone. Tomorrow you will carry out your duty. I can assure you that not even the most boastful person will continue with such useless threatening letters. They will be too afraid once we show them that we are not afraid of empty threats.” He smiles again. He pats the other person kindly on the shoulder. “Sleep well, Jeffrey. I might come to the court tomorrow.”

The Chief Justice bows formally and wishes the others a good night’s rest.

Outside in the corridor, he nearly bumps into the young Dennis Atterbury. He nods briefly and pushes past him because he is not in the mood for company.

“Sir Jeffrey.” The calm voice makes the Chief Justice hesitate and then look. “Something has upset you,” Atterbury continues. “Is it possible that I can help you?”

For a moment, the judge wants to ask the young man to go away and not bother him. But there is something in the calmness, the direct gaze, and the straightforward way in which Atterbury makes the offer that calms Sir Jeffrey’s mood. “You are observant, Mr. Atterbury,” he says as if talking to a friend, as if the other’s presence has a calming effect on him. A picture of the dark night outside and a black figure waiting somewhere for him flashes through the Chief Justice’s mind. The company of this young man, who seems so self-assured and at ease, as if he can handle any situation with calm efficiency, suddenly becomes appealing to Sir Jeffrey.

“There has been something that has upset me,” he says carefully. Acting on a sudden impulse, he continues, “You are, of course, a stranger to

the Cape, Mr. Atterbury. Why don't you come with me to my house? It is still early, and over a drink, we can talk for a while. My carriage will take you back home."

"It would be a pleasure, Sir Jeffrey. I have a room in the Castle, and I am a personal guest of His Excellency."

CHAPTER 2

The door porter bows low. The valet jumps off the box and lowers the step so that the two gentlemen can climb in.

“Your visit to us is not at the quietest time, Mr. Atterbury,” remarks the Chief Justice. His sharp features are briefly lit by the pale rays of a lamp along the Parade.

“It seems so to me, Sir Jeffrey,” Atterbury replies. “It is unfortunate,” he adds. “I might have decided to settle here. But,” he continues quickly, as if he does not want to talk about his personal affairs with the other, “the problems you are dealing with are from the civilian community.”

“Yes,” Sir Jeffrey sighs. “Their dissatisfaction is aimed at the Governor’s power.”

“But when have they had better privileges than now?”

“It is not so,” says the Chief Justice. “The people are not happy with what they have. They are now complaining about representation in the government of the Colony. It is not practical.

The population is too spread out, the means of transportation are too poor. There are also too few educated men in the farming community. You will see that it will cause chaos to give them a share in the government. Meetings will have to be arranged months in advance. Important decisions can be delayed for weeks before all the representatives are gathered. And even then, it will be impossible to make some of the stubborn citizens agree.”

“But what about local government? Even if they are not given representation in the central government, there are surely local matters they can solve themselves.”

“An attempt in that direction has been made, Mr. Atterbury,” the Chief Justice assures him. “However, it has failed. The landdrosts and heemraden have been removed and replaced by resident magistrates, who are appointed by His Excellency. It is now possible to decide and act quickly, for the resident magistrates are personally responsible to His Excellency.”

“And the citizens feel that certain rights have been taken away from them?”

“Yes. The feeling has been made worse by the removal of the Burgher

Senate here in the Cape.”

“Well,” remarks Atterbury calmly, “then I can understand why they are unhappy.”

“Do you mean that you find reason for it?” asks the Chief Justice, surprised.

“Not at all. I am just saying that I understand how they feel.”

“Do you mean that you can imagine yourself in their situation?”

“Is it so difficult?” Atterbury wants to know. “According to you, Sir Jeffrey, they are rather uneducated.” He looks out the window. He breathes in the fresh scent of the hundreds of flowers and bushes and trees in the Company’s Garden. “And now,” he continues, “do the citizens resist because of the few bags of grain that I have already heard so much about?”

“Yes.” Sir Jeffrey suddenly becomes agitated again. “The newspapers incite the citizens. That is why they become so cocky, and that is why it is necessary for the Swartland farmer to be punished severely.”

“What do you intend, sir Jeffrey?” The sarcasm is so subtle that the Chief Justice does not notice it. He also does not see Atterbury’s slight smirk in the darkness. He is not aware that the other is well aware of how the High Court is being used for the political goals of the Governor.

“At least a few years of imprisonment,” sir Jeffrey answers.

“A bit too much for the crime.”

“It is necessary, Mr. Atterbury. Everyone knows that His Excellency’s policy will be decided by my ruling. We must be strict. Once the citizens see that we are uncertain, that the Governor hesitates, they will simply come forward with impossible demands. The resistance must be stopped once and for all.”

“But will the citizens be happy with the ruling, sir Jeffrey?”

“Perhaps not,” the Chief Justice begins sharply. But then he sighs and continues with a sad gesture. “I have already received a threatening letter from, from one of them. That was why I visited His Excellency.”

“How do they threaten you?”

“My life if I do not acquit Francois Venter.”

“And what does His Excellency say?”

“He will have the court guarded. I will have a personal bodyguard until the worst dissatisfaction has calmed down.”