

MASKED ROBBER SERIES

9. THE MASKED ROBBER PREVAILS



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THE MASKED ROBBER PREVAILS by Gerrie Radlof

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SUMMARY

The Masked Robber Prevails is the electrifying conclusion to The Masked Robber series by Gerrie Radlof, an unforgettable saga set against the rugged landscapes and turbulent tensions of 19th-century Cape Colony, South Africa. In this ninth and final installment, every shadow conceals a secret, and every movement sparks intrigue as the mysterious Masked Robber, a figure of legend, rebellion, and justice, faces his most daring challenges yet.

The air is thick with unrest as tensions between colonial authorities and the people reach a breaking point. Whispers of betrayal, conspiracy, and treachery echo through the rolling hills, small villages, and grand halls of Cape Town. Jean, the enigmatic Masked Robber, along with his loyal companion Andre, emerges from the shadows once again to strike against injustice and corruption. But this time, the stakes are higher, the enemies more ruthless, and the line between friend and foe dangerously thin.

When a defiant young farmer, Albertus van Graan, finds himself imprisoned for speaking against the oppressive colonial regime, a spark is lit. In the dead of night, two black-clad riders appear like specters, launching a daring rescue that leaves a garrison humiliated and a region buzzing with rumors. Who orchestrated the escape? And why does it seem that Albertus's arrest was no mere accident but part of something far larger, a sinister plot stretching from Cape Colony to the heart of Europe's political powerhouses?

As Jean delves deeper into the mystery, he uncovers a chilling plan involving powerful foreign forces, hidden loyalties, and secrets that could change the fate of the Cape forever. Spurred by courage, wit, and his unshakable sense of justice, Jean navigates a treacherous world of spies, traitors, and ambitious adversaries who will stop at nothing to see him fall. Along the way, alliances will be tested, love will shine through the darkest hours, and battles, both physical and moral, will rage as the Masked Robber fights for what he believes is right.

With masterful storytelling and a rich blend of action, drama, romance, and suspense, Radlof brings the Masked Robber's tale to a breathtaking crescendo. Readers will be swept up in daring escapes, pulse-pounding confrontations, and moments of raw humanity that illuminate the struggles of a land on the brink of change. *The Masked Robber Prevails* is not just a tale of adventure but a story about honor, sacrifice, and the enduring fight for freedom. Who will triumph in the final clash between justice and tyranny? And what price will the Masked Robber pay for his legacy? The answers lie in the heart-pounding pages of this thrilling conclusion, a must-read for fans of historical drama and timeless heroes.

Prepare to be gripped from the first word to the last as *The Masked Robber Prevails* takes you on a journey you'll never forget.

EXTRACT

But Willa, who was still bent over the serving tray and who at that moment straightened up, therefore not immediately understanding what was happening, staggered back as the piece of glass sank into her left shoulder. She too let out a cry of fright and pain.

Like a furious tigress, Martine pounced on Elmien. The handle of the weapon with which she had hit Willa had broken off, and she now only had the one in her right hand left. She grabbed the terrified Elmien by the throat and pulled her hand back to stab her in the chest.

She was so blinded by rage that she was unaware of the figure that had appeared in the doorway and was storming towards her with long strides. She only noticed him when he pushed her arm aside so that the weapon was flung aside. It paralyzed her muscles, as the blow hit her like a metal bar. And then Jean slapped her with the back of his right hand so that her head snapped on her neck and she was flung back against the bed. His steel-grey eyes flashed with almost uncontrollable rage. Paralyzed with fright, she lay motionless.

But then he stepped back. Elmien had already recovered from the shock and was with Willa where she leaned against the wall. Without hesitating, she pulled out the shard of glass.

9. THE MASKED ROBBER PREVAILS

CHAPTER 1

The evening breeze blows cool against the faces of the two men sitting motionless on the black horses. Animal and rider blend into the darkness, disappearing among the bushes. The only movement is the flickering of the horses' ears and the long tails gently swaying in the breeze. But even this creates the impression of delicate leaves rustling in the gentle wind.

Both riders are dressed in tight-fitting shirts and trousers. Black gloves and sandals cover their hands and feet. Black masks cover their eyes. They stand on the slope of a low hill, so that even their dark figures are not visible against the sky.

They listen attentively. Then they hear the sound of hooves on the hard road winding through the valley just in front of them. The sound is coming from the direction of Stellenbosch.

"That must be them, Jean," says the rider closest to that side, gently nudging the reins against the neck of the black mare beneath him to prevent the animal from neighing.

"I hope so, Andre," replies the other. "One gets stiff from sitting still."

"We will have to get closer to see properly," Andre suggests.

"On foot then," Jean answers. "We will leave the horses here."

They slip out of the saddle and silently descend the hill until they are right beside the road. They crouch behind two low bushes and wait patiently.

Two figures emerge from the darkness. The riders pass by them at a leisurely pace.

"Those must be the scouts," Andre remarks.

They can feel the pounding of hooves in the damp earth beneath them. Every sense in them is sharp and alert.

A group of about twelve riders goes by. They ride in single file, deep in the muddy tracks.

"He is in the middle of the group." It is Andre speaking again. "His hands are tied behind his back."

"I have seen it, yes," comes the dry reply. "His feet are also bound under the horse's belly."

“They are guarding him closely, are they not?” Andre suggests.

“It is the tension in the air,” Jean calmly replies. “It is the result of injustice and violence. When a government feels unsafe, it acts harshly when someone speaks against it.”

He remains silent. The sound of the horses’ hooves fades away on one side, but from the other side, others draw closer.

“That is the rear guard.”

“How many of them?”

“It sounds like two. If there were two in the front, there probably would not be more than two at the back.”

“Should we let them pass, Jean, or...?”

“No. You stay here, Andre. I will sneak over.”

He does not explain further. The dark figure silently slides out from behind the bush and disappears like a shadow on the other side of the road.

The voices of the approaching riders are muffled but clearly audible. They sound at ease.

“If we had left earlier, we would have been there by now,” grumbles one. “What difference does it make? The distance is still the same.”

“It is midnight before we arrive in Cape Town. Then most of the places are already closed. After a boring day like today, I feel like going out and having some fun.”

“A good night’s rest will do you good.”

“I sleep enough,” he sighs. “Well, a soldier’s life is a dog’s life. Especially in a country where unrest always threatens. Anyway, I do not believe half of the stories. Every time a miserable peasant opens his mouth too wide, everyone screams treason. Every person surely has an opinion. Where in the world have you ever heard of a government that had the full support of every dear member of the population! And who has to bear the brunt in the end? Us, the poor officials of the state. We have to work until who knows how late at night...”

The words freeze in his throat. He tries to shout, but he cannot send a single sound through his vocal cords. The steel spring clasped around his throat presses his larynx.

It happened so unexpectedly that his confused mind cannot form the faintest impression of his attacker. He is only aware of the pressure

around his neck, and then he feels the iron grip closing over his hand on the reins. The horse jerks once beneath him but then continues to walk steadily as if the animal is aware that a masterful hand now controls it.

The soldier tries in vain to turn his head. He rolls his eyes and sees the black arm and hand piercing through from behind and stretching over the red sleeve of his jacket. There is someone on the saddle of the horse behind him.

It dawns on him that his comrade must have surely seen what happened. Why did he not shout or warn him then? He turns his eyes in that direction, and with a slight shock, he sees the black figure on the other soldier's horse. They are both in the same position. Their attackers must have silently jumped onto the horses from behind and grabbed them simultaneously. There is suddenly cold sweat on his forehead because the soundlessness with which everything has taken place evokes ominous and fearful thoughts in him.

A sense of contact with the supernatural takes hold of him, and he trembles like a reed.

But then he is brought back to reality. In his ear is the muffled voice that reassures him that it is indeed a human being who has assaulted him.

“Keep your hand still on the reins, friend. Let the horse just walk like that.”

The soldier would not have been able to move anyway, even if he wanted to. He does not know the purpose of the command. The grip around his throat remains unchanged, but he feels how the other hand is being taken away from his.

A moment later, and without the slightest warning, a hard blow strikes him behind his head. It turns black before his eyes, and he feels himself tumbling forward.

But he is unconscious when the black figure effortlessly lifts him out of the saddle and gently lowers him to the side of the road. He is unaware of the sudden silence in the roadway, where even the pounding of the horse hooves has come to a halt.

“That was easier than I thought, Andre,” Jean remarks as he slides off the animal's back and lands lightly on his feet. “You are still quick, old

man.”

“Old man,” grumbles Andre indignantly. “There are quite a few things I can teach you.”

“Most likely,” Jean replies with a chuckle. But then he sighs. “It is a pity we had to knock them out, but there was no other way.”

He throws the horse’s reins over a bush. His tall, agile figure bends over the unconscious soldier.

“Just strip off their jackets and trousers, Andre. That will be enough. Pull the hat down low over your eyes.”

He throws the jacket over his shoulders and then puts on the soldier’s knee-length pants but leaves the saddlebags and the boots. In the darkness, their legs would not be easily visible against the horses’ flanks. Then he is back in the saddle. He only needs to wait a moment for Andre.

“We are approaching a gallop,” he commands calmly. “If they might have heard that we stopped for a while, it will be easy to explain that we wanted to listen to what is coming up behind us.”

“What might be coming?” Andre inquires.

“Nothing, as you can hear for yourself,” Jean dryly retorts. “But that is not the information we are going to proclaim to the main force now. Come.” As usual, he sets off without further explanations. He knows that Andre will follow him, that he will react to a single word or the slightest movement. He can trust him completely.

Their hearing is sharp. It has developed through long years of an adventurous existence where they could expect death around every corner and turn. They are aware of the group of riders ahead of them even before they can see them. And clearly, they hear the outcry.

“Riders are approaching from behind, Captain!”

“Who is it?” the officer anxiously wants to know.

“I do not know. It is... it is the Kannemeyer gang. Who is coming there!?” he nevertheless loudly finds out, as if he believes that the preceding conversation could not be heard by the approaching riders.

“Kannemeyer,” Jean answers, his voice hoarse and flat, imitating one of the soldiers he heard speaking when he and Andre were still hiding in the bushes next to the road. “A group of riders is chasing after us at a furious pace,” he announces and when he reins in his horse, he and

Andre have already passed the rear soldiers.

“How many of them are there?” the officer now asks tensely. “Do not know,” Jean curtly replies.

“Then we must make tracks!” the captain bellows. “Forward at full gallop!”

Jean and Andre are on either side of the prisoner. He is between the two rows of soldiers in the middle of the roadway. But there are no mounted troops on the same level on either side of him because the road is too narrow. Where Jean had dashed through the bushes, he now pulls his horse inward. He kicks a soldier who had just stabbed his horse with his spurs, causing the animal to rear up on its hind legs. Jean races past right under his nose.

He leans over and grabs the reins of the horse on which the young farmer is tied. At that moment, a soldier from the other side delivers a hard blow to the horse’s crotch. He naturally responded to the captain’s command, and since the prisoner would not be able to get the horse moving on his own, he did it for him.

This suits Jean perfectly because immediately the frightened animal swerves away with him. He heads through the field between Jean and Andre, who had fallen on the other side.

“Can you not watch where you are going, Kannemeyer!?” bellows the soldier whose horse Jean had raced past.

“It seems to me the most cowardly one is thoroughly plagued by fear,” shouts the one on the other side. “Are you crazy, Kannemeyer?” he adds. “Where are you rushing to?”

“What is going on!?” thunders the captain’s voice from up ahead.

“I do not know,” answers the soldier. “Kannemeyer and the others are completely running away. It seems they cannot control their horses. The farmer’s horse chose to follow them.”

Meanwhile, none of them realize that a kidnapping is taking place right under their noses. The small troop has just come at full speed and is already a little distance past the spot where Jean and the others raced into the field. Only then does the captain understand that it would not benefit him to continue chasing without the captive.

“But turn them back!” he roars impatiently. “Go after them!”

He himself pulls his horse off the path, and the dumb animal must

trample wildly to avoid the rocks and bushes before the captain eases up a bit because he realizes the horse cannot see well in the darkness.

“Which way did they go?”

“Down here, toward the hill,” answers a soldier.

“Then keep your horses still!” barks the captain. “How in the devil are we supposed to hear where they are if you make such a racket!”

The troops come to a halt. After the shouting and the sound of hooves, everything suddenly becomes unnaturally quiet. A horse snorts, and it sounds loud in the night air. Another swings its head, and the metallic sound of the bit resonates through the night.

“Keep your horses still!” commands the captain sharply and tersely, as sudden unease gnaws at him.

They see no movement anywhere or hear the slightest sound. Not one of them dares to make a remark.

“Why are you sitting there like a bunch of statues?” the captain bellows, and a few of them startle in their saddles. “Spread out and search. They must have stopped and dismounted. They cannot be too far.”

He himself does not move. He is not too far from the path yet. The unease rises slowly within him. For a moment or two, he still cannot figure out what it is that disturbs him so intensely. But then he realizes it. The two soldiers who formed the rearguard were not far from them at all. If they had heard a group of riders approaching at a furious pace, those riders must have been within earshot for a long time now. Unless they too came to a halt, they never existed!

And if they did not exist, Kannemeyer told a deliberate lie. Or was it Kannemeyer? He tries to recall the hoarse warning shout of the man. Was it Kannemeyer’s voice or not?

But if it was not Kannemeyer, then who could it be? The troops would have noticed if they were not two soldiers.

He curses under his breath. He was sent to fetch a prisoner in Franschoek so that he could be tried in Cape Town. Why such a large military force was needed to escort one civilian, he does not know. He grows increasingly disgusted every day with the absurd speculations of riot, rebellion, and even civil war that constantly circulate. Everyone is on edge. No one can speak out against the government anymore without terrifying everyone and supposedly there must be a conspiracy afoot,

requiring immediate stricter measures.

But immediately his mood calms. Whatever his personal opinion may be, it has nothing to do with the fact that he received an order to fetch a prisoner in Franschoek and that the prisoner has now vanished like a needle under his nose.

He jerks the horse back onto the path. He dismounts and paces back and forth with his hands clenched behind his back. He is slightly startled when the first of his soldiers returns to him.

“Did you find anything?” he asks gruffly.

“Nothing, captain.”

“Then wait,” is all he answers, and he resumes his restless pacing up and down the road.

A little while later, he hears the crackling of dry twigs and a second rider emerges from the bushes. Another one comes from the left.

“We found the three horses, captain,” one of them calls out. “They are on foot here among the hills.”

“Then search!” he bellows. “On foot, they cannot get very far. Ride crosswise and straight across every inch of the area. Tell the others to keep searching. Report back to me as soon as you find something.”

“But it is dark,” one dares to say. “We might pass them and not see them.”

“Search!” the captain roars. “Keep searching!”

His legs go numb. Inside him, the fear of the report he will have to deliver if he returns to the Castle empty-handed rises.

CHAPTER 2

The captain is alone. Occasionally, he hears the stumbling of a horse or the rustling of bushes a short distance away where the soldiers move around in the darkness. A shuffle not far from him suddenly makes him stand still, motionless, and holding his breath. The sound is repeated. Carefully, the captain moves out of the deep rut and crouches behind a bush. His fingers tighten around the cool grip of his pistol as he slowly pulls it out of the sheath.

He hears a groan as if from someone who is either exhausted or injured. He wonders if it could possibly be one of the refugees, but he cannot recall a single shot being fired during the escape. Nor could the soldiers be so far that one of them shot someone without him hearing it.

He peers over the bush. His neck hairs feel tingly as if they are standing on end. Barely ten steps away from him, he sees the ghostly figure floating a foot or so above the ground. Cold sweat breaks out over his body, but years of discipline keep him anchored in his tracks.

Slowly, the impression of the supernatural fades. The white figure moves jerkily, and he can clearly hear the clapping of boots on the clay now. And a moment later, he can clearly see that it is a man in a white long-sleeved undershirt and trousers with long legs disappearing into black cassocks. He smiles bitterly. He now understands why it appeared as if the figure was floating in the air. The cassocks and boots were invisible in the dark. He approaches slowly.

“Who goes there?” he suddenly calls sharply, and the white figure comes to a halt. For a moment, there is only the panting breath, and then it comes out stuttering and tired.

“It... it is Kannemeyer, captain.” The soldier recognizes the officer’s voice.

“Kannemeyer?” the captain exclaims in horror and rushes towards the woods until he is right in front of the mute man. “Where in the world do you come from? What happened? Where is your uniform? What...?” He stops talking. Even before Kannemeyer can utter a word, a part of the truth dawns on the captain. With a sigh of helplessness, he puts the pistol back in its sheath.

“They attacked us from behind, captain,” Kannemeyer explains as he collapses disrespectfully on the ground in front of the captain.

“But who were they?” the captain sharply wants to know.

“I do not know.” Kannemeyer shakes his head wearily. “They were two black figures. When we saw them again, they were riding behind us on horses and squeezing our throats. Then they knocked us out, and when I came to, I was without my uniform.”

The captain does not answer. Two black figures. Two black figures that appeared from the night and abducted the prisoner.

“But... but where are the troops?” Kannemeyer begins cautiously and bewildered. “What is the captain doing here...?”

“They are looking for the prisoner,” the captain answers curtly. “We thought it was you chasing us, and before we could blink, those two, who of course put on your uniforms, chased the little fellow between us and disappeared over the hills. The men are searching for them.” And then his sense of responsibility returns to him. “Are you seriously injured? Where is your comrade?”

“It is just a graze behind the head, captain. Fred is coming after me.”

“Your horses have been found. Take them and go get your comrade.”

When the soldier rides back along the road, the captain resumes his restless watch. Occasionally, some of the men return to him, but he chases them back into the field. As long as they just stay around there, they must prevent the refugees from coming too far, and as soon as it becomes light, they can easily be dislodged from their hiding place.

But when day breaks, the dew-bright field is still and peaceful around him. The first few soldiers who come to report are sent angrily and impatiently on the trail of the kidnappers’ horses. The captain curses because he knows that his men have made crisscrossing tracks through the field. Yet, a while later, he is informed that they have found the spot where the three horses were discovered the previous night. From there, they follow the footprints of the three men. The captain rides at the front. The tracks are fresh, and no attempt has been made to erase them. About a mile back, they cross the main road, and against the slope of a flat hill, it is clear where the refugees mounted a few horses. The small troop rides over the hill at a trot, and with a wide turn, they eventually reach Blaauwberg beach. Here, the tracks run straight into the sea.

The captain turns his horse towards Cape Town. With a short, angry command, he calls his men to follow him.