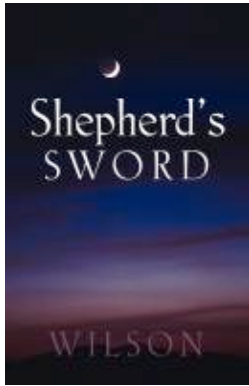




Shepherd's SWORD

WILSON



In order to rescue their friend Hanna, Joshua and his friend Japed face peril and sword in the pursuit of hope and love that thrusts the three into one of the greatest discoveries of all time.

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SHEPHERD'S SWORD

Daniel E. Wilson

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CHAPTER 2

Dangerous Escape

Hanna's heart leapt. The thought of escaping her wicked Uncle, and going on an adventure with Joshua was almost too much to hope for. In her few years, she had seldom left her cruel captivity except to help at times with purchasing food at the nearby market while Shaman slept off a night of wine. Almost instantly though, her fear of being a burden to Joshua shrouded her heart.

Joshua could see that she was torn in her thoughts. He could see her eye fill with both fear and hope, as he searched her scarred olive colored face. Joshua placed his hand on her arm and said he understood if she was afraid. "I am afraid as well, and doubt I can make the journey a safe or comfortable one for you either. But I know that you don't deserve the abuse you receive here at the hands of your uncle, and I'm certain it won't get better."

Hanna's mind whirled, but she couldn't bear the thought of never again seeing the fire of life that shone from the eyes of her young hero. So with fear and excitement bursting inside of her, she decided it was worth the attempt and agreed to go with him.

"Very well then" said Joshua. "I will come an hour before they close the gate to the city. I heard your uncle tell the merchant that he would be meeting him later this afternoon. Apparently the merchant has some business your uncle is very interested in, and I'm certain they will be preoccupied until morning."

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Hanna shook her head in agreement, and a cautious smile grew on her face. Joshua had asked her to be a part of her life. She had to go.

While Joshua was in the market Hanna did her daily chores. As the day moved slowly by, she quietly gathered some items for the trip, including those she'd had from her parents that her uncle either hadn't sold or considered useless. Some of these items would be good for the trip, but she was careful not to pack too much knowing that she would have a hard enough time moving through the night with her bad leg. Joshua would likely end up carrying most of her goods as well.

As evening came and her uncle had gone off to the merchant's, Hanna finished her packing, taking some bread, dried fish and meat, and a lamb skin of water. She also took the crude walking crutch that her uncle had given her some time back when he realized that her foot wouldn't heal enough to walk without some aid. His only thought being that she would need it to do her chores and earn her keep.

Joshua was there at the appointed time. The city gates closed three hours after sun set, giving them nearly eight hours of night to travel as far away from the city as possible. They would go east towards the mountains as best they could. It was in the opposite direction of where Cekil dwelt, so few if any would recognize Joshua, and none would recognize Hanna. Hanna was ready with her belongings and food. To her it seemed like a lot, but to Joshua it was little.

"Hurry, Hanna" said Joshua. "I know this will hurt your leg to move quickly, but we need to be as far away from the city as

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possible. We also need to make it to the gate within the half hour or we may be caught by the night guards.”

“I will go as fast as possible, Joshua” said Hanna. “My leg feels strong, and I have been getting better with my crutch, so I won’t be a burden.”

Luckily, from where Hanna’s uncle lived to the East Gate was the narrow part of town. The walk would only take about fifteen minutes for a normal man, but for Hanna, it would be a difficult trek in the needed thirty. With the adrenalin running through their veins and the streets being unusually quiet this particular evening, the two hurried on.

Just as they arrived at the gate, they could hear the guards giving the last call before closing the gate. They only had a few minutes before the guards would be coming down from their towers along the gate to push it closed and lock it for the evening. If this happened, the two would have to ask permission to exit, leaving a trail for Shaman and Cekil to follow. Joshua thought it best for them to sneak through the gate while the guards were climbing down from the watches, so they had made it there just in time.

Josh and Hanna just arrived at the corner of the nearest home when they heard the call. Hanna was out of breath because of the fast paced walk with her crutch, and both were shaking nervously. She knew this may be her only chance ever to escape the cruelty of her uncle’s home, so she was ready when Joshua pulled on her sleeve and told her to hurry.

As they slid alongside of the gate, they could hear the guards coming down their ladders. As usual, they were heavier men

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who weren't in the best of condition. Usually the city hired men who were no good at other labors and were selfish and cruel to keep the gates. It was a long and tiresome job that was tedious at best, but most men who would take such a job normally didn't have a family to go home to and usually didn't care about anyone else's worries but their own.

Realizing that one of the guards had made it to the ground just as they neared the gate caused Joshua and Hanna to freeze in fear. They could hear the big man leave the ladder and start his walk towards them as they cowered in the shadows. But as fate would have it, while the other guard was just finishing the climb down the ladder, he missed a rung near the bottom and fell with a huge "whumph" as he hit the ground.

The first guard was nearly on top of the children, who were hiding along side of a wagon next to the gate listening. But hearing the sound of his clumsy comrade's body hitting the ground, he turned his lantern away from the children back to the ladder, and with a shrill laugh went to aid his fallen companion. In an instant, two shadows hurried through the gate and moments later heard the gate being closed, and the sound of freedom being locked into place by the unsuspecting guards.

Joshua finally broke the silence and gravity of the situation when he said "Whew. I thought for sure we were caught back there. That would have been a bad way to start off one's escape, eh?"

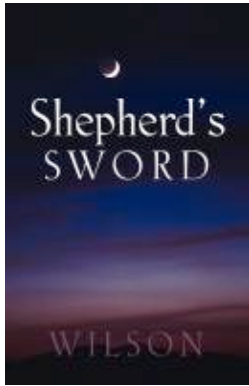
Hanna started to giggle with Joshua's comment. More out of pent up relief and nervousness than because of the humor of the moment. Then she became solemn and said, "I hope no

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one else saw us on our way. Although I'm terribly frightened of running away, I'm more frightened of going back to Uncle Shaman and bearing the brunt of his wrath."

"You don't need to worry about that any more, Hanna" said Joshua. "We'll be far away from here in a few days, and you'll never have to see him again. And I'll make sure no one ever harms you again either. From now on, you can consider me as your personal Moses, delivering you from your slavery to that wicked man! For now though, we will have to move quickly to get as far away from the city as possible. I have been down this road a few times with my master, and we should be able to reach a small cave I know of by morning's light. Can you walk until then?"

"Yes, I'm certain I can", said Hanna. "As excited as I am right now, I could walk for days!"



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