

THE SACRED DAGGER

by Rita Mohler Hanson

YESTERDAY: When the Emir's servants left Anne, dragged and weeping, at a tiny desert oasis she had had two companions—Blaze Sherwood and Pete Mackey, the first of whom she had been married as a means of escaping the Emir. The Emir was tricky, and betrayed them. Almost as frightening as the fact that Pete had disappeared, and apparently Anne and Sherwood must starve together.

Chapter 16 The Dead Man

BLAZE gazed at her a moment longer, shaking his head. "I've a hunch that a lover, like an artist, should not be too sympathetic." Anne continued to stare at him, blinking helplessly.

He drew the bed pallet that had been left them to the front of the tent and threw himself down on one side of it where he could look up and see the sky.

Presently Anne sat down on the edge near him. "Hungry?" he asked, scrutinizing her face.

"Not especially. A slight headache, you?"

"Not so bad. Think of our blessings! Free at last from all compulsions! Nothing to do but exist!"

She answered, a trace of derision in her voice. "Now is your chance to prove what absolute surrender to Destiny will bring you."

"If I'm man enough," he said. Anne began to laugh a bit unsteadily. "Grandmother must be turning over in her grave. Her young man said, 'Darling, I'm not worthy to kiss your little hand.'"

He grinned and persisted. "I'm trying to say that you and I belong to each other. Anne. Always have. Always will. Not in the sense of possession—love is not bound. But in the sense of having the same destiny, traveling the same road, responding to the same rhythm and," he smiled, "enjoying the same fun."

She eyed him skeptically. "So what?"

"You know what," he retorted. "Don't pretend."

"You're speaking outrageously."

"Granted, Anne. I'd like to shock you out of this smugness of yours. You won't admit you're a human being. You're more than a clothes horse."

She sprang angrily to her feet. "Blaze Sherwood!"

"Don't high hat me, Queen Victoria." He caught her ankle and brought her down on top of him. She screamed in unexpected surprise and terror. He released her at once, rolled her over on her back on the pallet and moved away an arm's length on the rug and sat up.

"Anne, you're acting like a little fool. Your body shouldn't be afraid of mine."

She laid an arm across her eyes, and when she was breathing quietly again, tried to explain. "All her life a girl is trained and admonished to keep herself to herself. Then someone like you comes along and calls her a little fool."

He gazed at her contritely. "I understand. I've been clumsy. Sorry, precious." He clasped her hand that lay between them. "Any objection to our hands, at least, becoming acquainted?"

She smiled and shook her head. "Besides, I'm here on a mission that excludes you. I will not forget that."

"You can't keep from falling in love with me, Anne."

"I can keep from doing anything about it."

"Agreed," he admitted. "But people who live only for the future cheat themselves of both the present and the future."

Anne looked at him helplessly. "You think of the strangest things."

He smiled. "Maybe hunger has something to do with it." She felt that he gave all kinds of meanings to the word.

"I should think you'd hate me," she remarked. "If I didn't exist you wouldn't be in this horrible predicament."

"You swear we're going to live," he reminded her, suddenly changing tactics. "If so, it's not such a horrible predicament. A week or two of fasting is no more than food for the soul. I'm getting out. See you later."

They spent much of that day talking about food, though she noticed that he seemed preoccupied at the same time as if his secret thoughts were quite different from his surface speech.

When she asked him what he had found among the clay ridges he answered, "An eagle's nest from which the life has flown."

"I'd like to see it."

"Nothing to see," he answered quickly. "You'd only tire yourself." She made a secret resolve to take the walk.

Once, when he would have put an arm around her she drew away. He looked at her steadily for a moment. "Do you still think we're coming out of this alive, Anne?"

"I refuse to believe anything else."

He started to reply and then restrained himself.

That afternoon he went off in the direction from which the carriage had brought them. "To see what I can see," he explained, but did not ask her to accompany him. When he was out of sight she headed across the basin in the direction of the eagle's nest.

Strangely enough, as she approached the region she was thinking of Mackey, wondering what had become of him, for there was no evidence of a fight. Skirting a clay ridge she came to the spot where it met an encroaching dune.

Suddenly she stopped and stared—stared unbelievably at a dead, stark, unreluctant certainty. She found she was whispering to herself.

An eagle's nest from which the life has flown. They killed him. He fought and the soldiers killed him. She went to the grave in the sand and knelt down. Mackey's uniform coat decorated the mound as a blanket of flowers would have done at home. She lifted a sleeve of the coat to her cheek, and crouched there crying softly until the sorrow that wrung her heart was chilled by physical exhaustion.

Suddenly the flapping of wings startled her. A great eagle settled down on the comb of the dune above and watched her with his fierce golden eyes. Wonder was added to her fear of him. When she backed away the bird sidled after her for a few rather terrifying moments and then descended and began preening his wings.

Despair

SHERWOOD had not returned when she arrived at the tent. She looked up anxiously at the rim of the bowl in the direction he had taken and then down at her body, faint with the effects of fatigue and hunger and sorrow. Suddenly she crumpled to the pallet, and when she finally roused, the sun had set and she was still alone.

"Perhaps something has happened and he will never return," she thought in wild despair, as she stood in front of the tent watching the sunlight fade and the pale stars appear. If he were not here when the moon rose she would take his path and follow the stars, better than this dreadful waiting.

Her knees were trembling. She clung to the tent cloth for support, trying vainly to think of what wisdom she had been taught for such an occasion.

Then she looked up and saw Sherwood coming down the path. For a moment her breathing stopped; she could not move, but stood and stared, glad the moonlight would not reveal the tear-stained face.

"Anne," he called. Instantly her strength returned and she ran to him. His head hung in weariness; his clothes were caked with mud.

"I had a little difficulty," he said, patting her hand that clung to his arm. "Didn't know for a while if I'd come back or not. Got caught in quicksand." He threw himself down on the ground in front of the tent and when she protested, replied, "I'm too dirty to go inside. Let me get my wind. Later I'll change and swim."

She wanted to do something for him—bring him a drink—bathe his face. And she wanted to do something for herself—kiss him—take him in her arms—feel his nearness. But she saw his greatest need for the moment was rest and stillness.

If only she had food for him! She had lost her own hunger, but followed the man who had picked up his hat and went down to the falls to carry him water, taking time to wash her tear-stained face. He was sitting up when she returned and drank greedily.

"Why didn't you ask me to go with you?" she queried as she knelt there before him.

He looked at her. "I don't know," he said. "Wanted to save your strength, I guess."

For what?

He started again. "I don't know." After a moment's pause he asked, "Want to swim with me, Anne?"

She went inside the tent to change.

He was floating lazily when she joined him. "The water is like cream," he called.

They came out together and dropped down on the sand where the dune had stuck its thirsty tongue into the lake. "I'm a new man," he said.

"I wish I had something to feed you."

"Love is nourishment enough, Anne."

When she saw he would say no more she asked, "What did you find out today?"

"Only this—there is nothing we can do to get away."

To be continued

On the Radio Chains

STATIONS:

Where to find them on the dial
KEX, 1190, Portland; KFI, 610, Los Angeles; KGA, 1510, Spokane; KGO, 810, San Francisco; KGW, 650, Portland; KJR, 1000, Seattle; KKN, 1070, Los Angeles; KLN, 850, Denver; KOIN, 870, Portland; KOMO, 950, Seattle; KPO, 630, San Francisco; KSL, 1190, Salt Lake.

Time Shown is PST

Thursday
5:00 p. m.—Music Hall, KPO, KOMO, KGW, Major Bowes' Amateur Hour, KNX, KOIN, KSL, Tommy Dorsey's Orch., KGO, KEX, KJR.

5:30 p. m.—Drama Behind the News, KGO, KJR, KEX.

6:00 p. m.—Glen Miller's Orch., KNX, KOIN, KSL; Xavier Cugat's Orch., KPO, KOMO, KGW; Rudy Vallee, KEX, KGO, KJR.

6:30 p. m.—Richard Himber's Orch., KPO; Ahead of the Headlines, KGO, KJR; Something to Think About, KEX; Quilt of Two Cities, KOMO, KGW.

7:00 p. m.—Amos 'n' Andy, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Fred Waring, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Elizabeth Russell, KGO, KEX; Concert Trio, KJR.

7:30 p. m.—Spotlight, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Fanny Brice, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Clark Dennis, KJR; Dinner at Omar's, KGO; Silken Swing, KEX.

8:00 p. m.—Easy Aces, KGO, KEX, KJR; City Desk, KNX, KOIN, KSL; Aldrich Family, KPO, KOMO, KGW.

8:30 p. m.—Tommy Riggs, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Chuck Foster's Orch., KJR; Answer Auction, KNX, KOIN; Fellow Sportsmen, KGO; Baseball Game, KEX; Fashion Notes, KSL.

9:00 p. m.—Paul Sulltan, KNX, KOIN; Comedy, KPO; Jim Blade's Orch., KJR, KGO; Faithful Stradivari, KGW; Musical Quinella, KSL; Symphonic Serenade, KSL.

9:30 p. m.—Lions' Hampton's Orch., KSL; Neil Bondshu's Orch., KPO; Skinnay Ennis' Orch., KGO, KEX, KJR; Good Neighbors, KGW; By the Way, KOIN; Richard Himber's Orch., KOMO.

10:00 p. m.—Reporter News, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Ray Noble's Orch., KSL; News, KOIN.

10:30 p. m.—Ed Stocker, KGW; Masterworks of Music, KNX; State Traffic, KOIN; Industry and Defense, KOMO.

11:00 p. m.—Skinnay Ennis' Orch., KGO; Ken Stevens, KJR, KOIN; Bill Sabransky, KEX, KJR; Music You Want, KGO.

Friday
5:00 p. m.—Waltz Time, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Janet Jordan, KGO, KJR; Quiz, KEX; Buddy Maleville's Orch., KNX; Eyes of the World, KOIN; University of Utah, KSL.

5:30 p. m.—Drama Behind the News, KGO, KJR; Uncle Walter's Dog House, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Drama, KEX.

6:00 p. m.—Hollywood Premiere, KSL, KNX, KOIN; Romance and Rhythm, KGO, KEX; Wings of Destiny, KPO, KOMO, KGW.

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7:30 p. m.—Death Valley Days, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Great Moments from Great Plays, KNX, KOIN, KSL; Ben Bernie's New Army Game, KGO, KEX, KJR.

8:00 p. m.—Charlie Spivak's Orch., KPO; Grandpappy and His Pals, KGO, KJR, KEX; Kate Smith Hour, KNX, KOIN, KSL; Richard Himber's Orch., KGW; Fish Finder, KOMO.

8:30 p. m.—Chuck Foster's Orch., KJR; Al Donahue's Orch., KPO; We're Building a House, KGO; Baseball Game, KEX; Port Lewis News, KGW; Public Schools Pgm., KJR; Port Lewis Life, KOMO.

9:00 p. m.—Orzie Nelson's Orch., K O; Jim Blade's Orch., KJR; Paul Sullivan, KNX; Chuck Wagon Days, KGO; Your Mayor Speaks, KGW; Highlights Hour, KOMO; Symphonic Serenade, KOMO.

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