

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

SYNOPSIS: As Major Napoleon Bonaparte of the Foreign Legion plots treachery to France in the desert near the Citadel of Meknes, Margaret Malloni surveys the scene in the Citadel itself. She has married Jules Malloni her father's ward, without losing him. They have gone to Meknes, where Jules' father is old to the Kaid, on a visit. The visit lengthens precariously; Jules "goes native" with a vengeance. Margaret feels herself surrounded by sinister influences, not the least of them young Ralsul, son of the Kaid.

Amazing to think that that middle-aged gentleman sitting there, enjoying his Turkish cigarette and coffee, was a human monster, a brute who had always delighted not merely in savage war, but in its aftermath of slaughter and actual torture.

Chapter 14 THE BACKGROUND

SIGHING angrily—the anger at herself—Margaret glanced at the man who sat beside her husband. Ralsul. First introduced to her at Oxford as "Mr. Russell," introduced to her that day at Jack's luncheon-party in Jack's rooms at St. Just's; that day when Otho was so silly and stand-offish—unlike himself—as though for the first time in his life he wished her to remember that he was Sir Otho Mandeville-Belleme and not her childhood's darling and hero, Tho of Big Atto.

When she had greeted him as "dear old Tho," he had called her Miss Maykings instead of Murgie or some other pet-name of the days when he approved her as a congenial playmate and comrade, a good chap. Yes, that was the day on which "Mr. Russell" had first met her. It was also the day before that on which he had declared his undying passion for her. . . . The amazing creature. He had never taken his eyes from her face throughout that lunch; had inquired at which hotel she and her father were staying; had immediately transferred himself from his own hotel to theirs; stared at her unwaveringly at tea-time, at dinner-time, at the boxing-match which followed; at breakfast-time next morning, and then, catching her alone in the lounge, had laid his hand and fortune at her feet and demanded her hand in return.

How she and Dad had laughed, and how Jack and Jules and Mother had laughed, about it. "Mr. Russell," otherwise the Kaid Ralsul Abdallah Karim, son and heir to the great Kaid Haroun Abdallah Karim, the most powerful man in Morocco, greater far than the Sultan himself and able to defy more than two or three European powers when he could not play them off one against the other. "Mr. Russell," late distinguished alumnus of the Paris Sorbonne, full-blooded Moor who spoke English, French and Spanish as perfectly as he did his native Arabic. Strange that the true pure-bred Moor, a princely descendant of a hundred princes, warriors, corsairs, leaders and rulers of armies and of fleets, should be the one who sat there in a chair of European origin and crossed precisely as he would have been at a bachelor dinner-party in Mayfair—strange that it should be he rather than Jules Malloni of Eton and Oxford.

Did he, with his subtle cleverness, wear that dinner-jacket, black tie, those black silk socks and patent shoes because he guessed or intuitively knew that she must hate to see her husband with his bare feet stuck into Arab slippers, awaiting there in native dress? Strange that the Etonian Oxonian Englishman should dress and squat like a native while the real Moor should dress, look and behave like an English gentleman. Yes, almost certainly it was calculated, for Ralsul did nothing without a reason and a motive. For how long would he "behave like an English gentleman" here in Morocco? How she was fancying things or was he going to make himself a nuisance, and if so would he be very difficult to manage? Suddenly Ralsul, who had been industriously picking a flower to pieces, looked up, opened wide his great dark eyes, gazed into hers and, as though reading her thought, smiled with a flash of brilliant teeth. Not a friendly pleasant smile of kindness and affection, but a twisted smile, sardonic, sarcastic, enigmatic.

Ignoring him, Margaret's glance travelled on and rested for a moment upon the fat, jolly, evil and cruel face of his father, the Kaid Haroun Abdallah Karim. Watching him as he sat chuckling and whispering with Zainub, his wife, whose lively sallies evidently pleased him much, Margaret found it almost impossible to believe the tales of his appalling cruelty, tales that her husband's mother, the Kaid's own half-sister, had told her—as interesting anecdotes and family gossip.

And yet why wonder at this if, as one was taught, heredity and environment make the man? What else should this descendant of pirates, bandits, brigands and raiders be, living as he did in this robbers' stronghold, dominating a wild land known as "The Country of the Gun" because it produced nothing else but the gun and its people lived and died by the gun?

Was there as much difference between this cruel blood-stained medieval baron and his twentieth century son as there was between their respective dress? Was there as untamed and unchanged a savage Moor in Ralsul's Savile-Row dinner-kit as there was in Haroun's silken garments?

Why on earth had she been such a fool as to come into this horrible country, among these incredible people, into this fantastically impossible, fantastically real Moorish life that they led today as they led it two hundred and three hundred and, for all she knew, five hundred and a thousand years ago?

Margaret had thought it a simply splendid idea and a unique opportunity of seeing—not as the tourist sees it—a uniquely interesting country. And there, awaiting her arrival, had been Ralsul, a little too insistent on the fact that they were now cousins and he endowed with cousinly privileges.

Had the Kaid any influence and power over his son, or did he love him with too besotted a devotion to thwart or cross him in anything whatsoever? According to Jules' mother, El Isa Beth el Ain, the child had ruled the man from babyhood and, far from ever denying him anything, the Kaid had turned his murderous wrath upon any man, woman, child or beast that had ever refused, thwarted, hindered or angered the boy.

Had he not stabbed with his own hand the favorite horse from which Ralsul, as a child, had fallen? Had he not consented to the death of his own nephew, Jules, because of Ralsul's mother's bare suggestion that Jules might grow up to be an enemy and a usurper? No, probably the Kaid's influence over Ralsul was all while that of Ralsul over the Kaid was paramount. From the Kaid, Margaret glanced at his wife, the once lovely Zainub, who, according to El Isa Beth el Ain, had been reputed the loveliest woman in Morocco, the desired of the Sultan himself—the autocratic all-powerful Sultan whom the Kaid had first defied and then defeated.

Evidently a woman of character, forcefulness and determination, as proved by the one fact alone that she had retained her power and influence over her ferocious, autocratic and untrammelled husband. Evidently, too, a woman of fascination and charm, in that the Kaid apparently enjoyed her society today as he had done 20 years ago. What was the secret of her power that she should retain and, according to El Isa Beth el Ain, augment and strengthen it, even as she changed from lovely girl to fat old woman. For a Moorish woman in her forties is old. Probably she and the Kaid were "two minds with but a single thought" on most subjects, and he admired her ruthlessness and strength as much as he had once admired her beauty. What a pity one could not talk to her, get her point of view, attitude and outlook on life and current events—if talk she would, to a hated and despised outsider. Watching her as she sat with uncovered face, Margaret thought of an ageing Lucrezia Borgia, a Cleopatra in middle-life, of Catherine de Medicis and Catherine of Russia. Of such was the Lady Zainub, wife of Abdallah Karim and mother of Ralsul. And that equally, if differently, amazing woman who sat next to her, the Lady El Isa Beth el Ain, Jules' mother, half-sister of the Kaid. How could she have found life bearable and contrived to live it beneath the same roof, however vast, as the woman who had tried to kill her baby, the little Jules, and who had put the child's life in such danger that she, the child's mother, had sent it away, with little hope of seeing it again.

(Copyright, 1933, P. A. Stokes Co.) The Lady El Isa Beth el Ain asks herself a question, tomorrow.

ATLANTIC DEEPEST OFF PUERTO RICO

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, Feb. 24.—(AP)—An ocean depth of nearly nine miles, discovered 75 miles north of this island, was claimed today to be the lowest point in the bed of the Atlantic.

CHAMPION LIAR NOW STRONG FOR TRUTH

RAY CITY, Mich., Feb. 24.—(AP)—Orin W. Butts is glad now that he can put a "retired" before his title of "champion liar of the United States." Settling out for a club meeting last night, he ended up in general hospital with a sprained leg, and he wants his wife to believe that he fell down the stairs at Trainman's hall. Butts relinquished his championship at the last liars' contest held in Burlington, Wis.

FIRST WAR CASUALTY SUCCEUMS IN REDDING

PITTSBURG, Feb. 24.—(AP)—John Weir Tripp, first casualty in the American expeditionary forces, was buried today. While aiding in construction of a narrow gauge railroad for the British army on the Cambria front near the Somme, Tripp was wounded by shrapnel September 27, 1917. Tripp was a member of a New York engineer regiment. He died February 15 in Redding, Calif., and was brought here for burial.

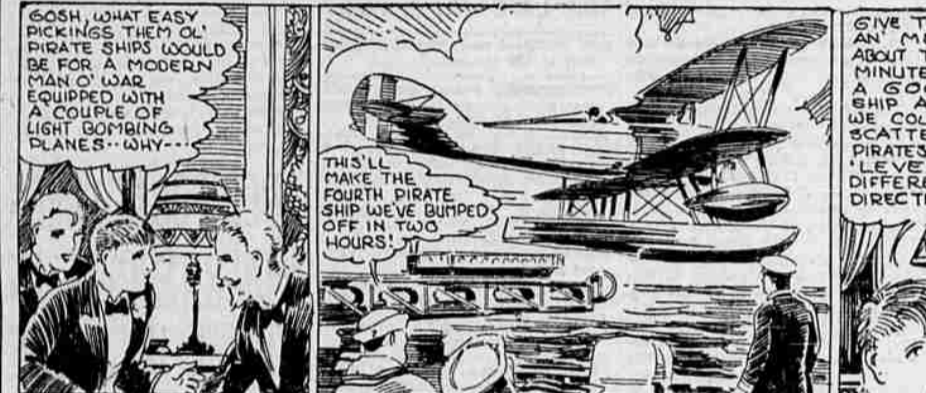
S'MATTER POP—



DIFFICULT DECISIONS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Skeeter's Idea Of Quelling Piracy



BOUND TO WIN—The Questioning Begins



THE NEBBS—The Rival?



BRINGING UP FATHER



POLICE RADIO SOUGHT FOR SALEM SAFEGUARD
WASHINGTON, Feb. 24.—(AP)—The Salem police department has applied to the radio commission for a construction permit for a municipal police station, it was announced here today. The station would operate at from 30 to 120 watts power. The wavelength was not specified.

fresh as a new day
WRIGLEY'S PEPPERMINT
PERFECT GUM
KEPT RIGHT IN CELLOPHANE

There's No Guesswork in Tribune A. B. C. Circulation