

# VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

**SYNOPSIS:** The deeper Jules Maligni sinks into drunkenness, and into the intrigue of the Citadel of Mekassen, the more desperate becomes the situation of Margaret Maligni, his English wife. All about her treachery to Ootot, toward France, plotted by the Kaid of Mekassen, and by Major Napoleon Baccot, of the Foreign Legion, encompassed not far away, Ralsul, son of the Kaid, having gotten Jules drunk, slips into Margaret's room.

## Chapter 20

### WHERE WAS JULES?

"Do you call this behaving like a man?"

"Like a man in love," said Ralsul. "Like a man who knows exactly what he wants, and intends to get it. If you had fifty husbands and each one had an army, I would get you—and keep you."

Margaret yawned audibly, tapping her open mouth with her hand awhile. A brave effort.

"Very interesting, Ralsul," she said. "Getting quite a big, boastful boy, aren't you? But won't you tell me the rest of the story some other time? I want to go to sleep again, and little as I like boastful boys, I should hate to see my husband come and throw you over the balcony. Three hundred feet, isn't it? You'd be a nastier mess than you are now."

Again Ralsul laughed and drew a step nearer. Margaret turned to the bed behind her, and a faint sound was audible as she moved the pillow.

"Don't move again," she said, "except in the direction of the door, or this pistol will go off—and I hate the noise they make in a room."

"Oh! Little spit-fire has got a pistol, has she? What a liar Jules is."

"As it happens, Jules doesn't know I've got it," replied Margaret—with perfect truth, for she had no pistol, and had never touched a pistol in her life.

"So you don't tell our husband everything, do you?"

"I shall have something to tell him as soon as he comes," answered Margaret bravely. "If he doesn't come while you're here and break every bone in your body."

Again the amused laugh.

"Well, you tell him, darling—and then tell me what he says, will you?" said Ralsul.

"I think I can tell you that, now," he added. "He'll say: 'Oh, you mustn't mind young Ralsul. The boy will have his joke. He will...'"

"Look here," Margaret interrupted him abruptly, making her voice as hard and harsh as she could. "Get out—or I'll shoot you. Go on. Get out, you cur."

That maddening mocking laugh again.

"You wouldn't shoot me just for standing here—and telling you that you're the loveliest woman on this earth, or in Paradise; and that I worship you, would you?" he asked softly.

"Unless you go instantly, I will shoot you for coming into my room in the middle of the night, and making love to me. Now go."

And this time it was Margaret who took a step forward.

Laughing, Ralsul drew back.

"Oh, splendid! I love you more than ever, darling. And I shall love you still better without the pistol. Ever so much. I don't want to die for you, darling, not a little bit. I want to live for you—and with you."

"I'll count ten," said Margaret.

"One... two..."

"Buckle my shoe," said Ralsul.

"Three... four..."

"I'll shut the door," said Ralsul, "after me," and Margaret saw him pass between her and the balcony archway.

"Good night, darling," he said from the door. "We've got all life before us, and there is no hurry. We'll have another jolly talk when there are no nasty pistols about..."

The door shut, Margaret rushed across the room, thrust home the huge clumsy bolts, tottered back to her bed and collapsed upon it.

She awoke to find herself lying across the over-cushioned, fatiguingly unpleasant, dubious, slightly musty, fusty, frowsy bed, in her dressing-gown.

She sat up.

Had she had a horrible nightmare? No. It was not a dream.

She must get out of Morocco—at once.

How? How could she get away from this awful place?

Where was Jules?

She had bolted the door.

Had he come up and found it fastened?

Why hadn't he hammered and waked her?

What time had it been when that vile beast had come to her room? She must get a pistol and learn to fire it.

But how utterly absurd in the twentieth century. Such things don't happen. But this wasn't the twentieth century here in Mekassen; it was about the fifteenth, and such things did happen.

What would Jules do to Ralsul? And what would they do to Jules if he killed him? Something terrible, something unthinkable, for Ralsul was the apple of the Kaid's eye. He positively worshipped him and, according to El Iza Beth el Ain, the Kaid was a monster of cruelty and savagery when his anger was aroused, and very often when it wasn't.

He'd torture Jules to death if Jules injured Ralsul.

Perhaps she had better not tell Jules, after all?

But she must, for several reasons. If she didn't tell him, she could produce no sufficient reason for insisting that they should leave Mekassen instantly.

If she didn't tell him—it might happen again.

If she didn't tell him, Ralsul would not get the horse-whipping that he deserved if ever a man did.

If she didn't tell him, Jules wouldn't understand her wish for a pistol, and her demand that he should never leave her unprotected.

Of course she must tell him... But she must insist on his keeping his temper and controlling the indignant rage that would lead him to thrash Ralsul within an inch of his life.

She must point out to him that Ralsul was all-powerful here, and that, by coming here, they had put themselves completely outside the pale of civilization and all that civilization stands for.

She must remind Jules of the terrible dungeons and torture-chamber here, and of the Kaid's besotted worship of his son, and of his unbridled savagery, and ferocious cruelty to those who offended him.

And if Jules turned a deaf ear to her prayers, advice, and warning, she would use his love for her as a conclusive argument, and point out that if anything happened to him, her plight would be terrible indeed.

Margaret rose from the bed and, thinking that she would give anything to be able to walk into her bathroom at home, performed her uncomfortable ablutions in a curtained alcove, as best she might, with the aid of a kind of glorified brass coffee-pot, a big earthenware jar of water, and a large brass basin.

Yes, she told herself, as with her hand-mirror in one hand and brush in the other, she looked out across the shimmering rocky, dusty plain, she must tell Jules, after breakfast and, while minimizing the outrageous offense sufficiently to keep Jules from "seeing red" and losing control, still make it sound serious enough to ensure his taking her away at once.

But after her breakfast of coffee, fruit and bread Margaret did not tell Jules—nor at any other time that day—for she did not see him.

He was, according to Ralsul—who came upon her in the garden, and with unblushing effrontery, ignored her cutting and contemptuous refusal to speak to him or notice his presence—unwell, suffering from a bad headache, and quite unable to get up.

Finding that Margaret completely refused to speak to him, look at him, or in any way realize his presence, even to the extent of asking where her husband was, Ralsul laughed and observed:

"Villain-avaunt-said-she. But-my-hour-will-come-said-he-for-vice-aboard-the-lugger-and-the-girl-is-nine. And with a hissing scowl he gnashed both-his-teeth-dung-cloak-about-his-shoulder-and-strode-away, and strode away."

Margaret did not look up from the book which she was not reading, but as soon as Ralsul was out of sight, went in search of El Iza Beth el Ain.

She was Jules' mother and, to that extent, perhaps Margaret's friend. Presumably she would be able to get to the bottom of the matter, and find out where Jules was and what had happened.

Probably Ralsul had put some filthy drug in his coffee or wine.

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Margaret finds, tomorrow, still another trouble in El Iza Beth el Ain's apartment.

since a week ago" by his personal physician and son-in-law, Dr. Frank Jirka, today. Dr. Jirka's statement followed an official bulletin which said the mayor had a comfortable night, sleeping most of the time and awakening "feeling quite rested."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Joe H. Gill, Miami society woman, also critically wounded by Zangara, remained in serious condition as a result of an infection of the wound she received in her abdomen.

# JOBLESS YOUTHS

## ARMY DRILL OUT

WASHINGTON, Mar. 3.—(AP)—The house today took its last necessary action on the \$49,000,000 war department appropriation, accepting a compromise with the senate that eliminated \$22,000,000 to train unemployed youths in year-round camps.

# OREGON BOURBONS

## FOR SEN. WHEELER

SALEM, Ore., March 3.—(AP)—Senator Burton K. Wheeler of Montana was recommended for the cabinet position as attorney general in a telegram sent to President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt last night by a group of Oregon legislators and J. E. Bennett, Portland city commissioner.

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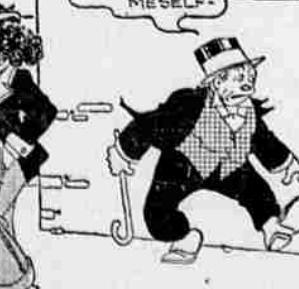
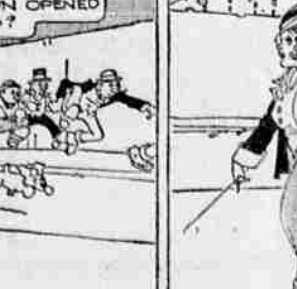
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By George McManus



### CERMAK CONTINUING SHOW IMPROVEMENT

MIAMI, Fla., Mar. 3.—(AP)—The condition of Mayor Anton Cermak of Chicago was described as the "best since a week ago" by his personal physician and son-in-law, Dr. Frank Jirka, today. Dr. Jirka's statement followed an official bulletin which said the mayor had a comfortable night, sleeping most of the time and awakening "feeling quite rested."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Joe H. Gill, Miami society woman, also critically wounded by Zangara, remained in serious condition as a result of an infection of the wound she received in her abdomen.

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