

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

SYNOPSIS: Left unprotected among the swirling intrigues of the Citadel of Meksem, Margaret Maligne seeks to find Ratsul, son of the rich man who has been ordered to have a pistol, later she has been made drunk by Ratsul. Behind it all is a series of plots against France involving the Kaid, Ratsul, and Major Napoleon Bloch of the Foreign Legion, escaped not far away.

Chapter 21

MARGARET PERPLEXED

AS MARGARET approached the heavy iron-studded garden-door at the foot of the staircase that led up to the apartments of the Lady El Isa Beth el Ain, who was also the Senora Maligne, an old man, clad in a dirty hooded cloak, rose from the great squared stone that was at once a mounting-block and a door-step.

"I want to see..." began Margaret, and as the man shook his head, realized that it was useless to speak to him in English.

"Je desire..." and again the man shook his head, and with uplifted eyebrows, signed to her to stay where she was, while with the other he pointed first to himself and then to the stairs.

In the shadow of the vast wall of the courtyard, Margaret waited until Hassan el Miskien, reappearing, beckoned to her to come with him.

Followed by Margaret, the door-keeper climbed three steep flights of stairs and traversed several dark and airless stone corridors.

At another heavy iron-studded door he halted, unfastened it, pushed it open and held aside a heavy curtain for Margaret to enter.

The conversation that ensued was difficult and unsatisfactory, both by reason of the ladies' lack of proficiency in one of their mutual languages—which were English and French—and by reason of what Margaret considered the other's unreasonable attitude.

"Yes, my son Jules is here," Margaret understood her to say in her curious English and still more faulty French. "He is ill—very ill. It's your fault. If he could be stayed with me, he would never have learnt these nasty foreign habits. And why are you so cold? And why are you not obedient to Jules, as a good wife should always be to her husband?"

In English where she could, and in French where she must, Margaret endeavored to point out that it was only when he had returned to his own country that Jules had developed bad habits, and that in England he had been as abstemious as the average English gentleman and had never, on any occasion, so far as she knew, drunk more than was good for him.

Whereat the mother shrugged and looked sceptical.

Nor should El Isa Beth el Ain forget that she too had English blood in her veins, and that an English wife held a position very different from that of an Arab wife. They were not slaves, and it was not expected of them that they should be unquestioningly obedient to their husbands. They were their husbands' partners, friends and equals—not their chattels.

"I'll help you then, smiled Margaret diplomatically. "Sara is helping me," was the reply.

"Look here," said Margaret angrily, rising from the divan. "This is all nonsense. Where's my husband? I'm going to him now. I insist."

"Where's 'hat'?" "Through there," replied El Isa Beth el Ain, pointing to a small door in a Moorish horse-shoe setting, opposite to the one by which she had entered.

Without further remark, Margaret ran to the door, only to find it entirely devoid of any kind of handle, knob, bolt or keyhole—and entirely immovable.

Having pushed with all her strength, and thrown herself against the door as heavily as she could, Margaret rushed across to the other one, determined to find a way round. Pulling back the curtain that hung on the inner side of the thick wall, she tried to open the door. This also was immovable, presumably locked from without.

Hammering upon the heavy mass of wood, endeavoring to shake it, Margaret realized that she was panic-stricken; that the cold tide of fear was rising higher and higher. This would not do. She must not lose control. Panic was never any good to anybody. She must be cool, and wary, and brave.

"A trap!" she said. "Of course it's not. Don't be so absurd. You came here of your own free will, and you can go whenever you like."

"Jump over that balcony, do you mean?" asked Margaret. "If you wish. But it would be pleasant to give the signal to Hassan el Miskien that we want the door open. You knock twice quickly and three times slowly, and hard, for Hassan is getting a little deaf and might not hear knuckles. Use the handle of that dagger."

And El Isa Beth el Ain pointed to where, on a table, lay a large dagger with hilt and sheath of heavy cut steel, the top of the handle flattened out into the shape of an open fan, and the end of the sheath curved sharply round in a small semi-circle.

Margaret picked up the dagger. "Thank you," she said. "Could you give me this? Might I take it with me?"

"Certainly. Souvenir to take home—when you go." Margaret hung in doubt for a moment, and then came to a decision.

"I'll tell you something," she said, "and then perhaps you'll understand—if you didn't before—why I insist on being with my husband."

"Last night, knowing that my husband was not there, Ratsul came to my bedroom and insulted me unbelievably, unspeakably. . . Made love to me. . ."

"Ratsul did?" "Yes, Ratsul." "He made love to you?" "Insulted me, I said. Told me that he loved me, and that he. . ."

"Only told you?" "Only! Yes." "How did you get rid of him, then?" "It was quite dark in the room, and I told him I would shoot him if he did not go. I pretended I had a pistol. Could I get one?"

STANDARD OIL SUED FOR AUTO ACCIDENT

A suit of Minnie J. Burrows, against the Standard Oil company of California for \$5000 alleged damages, as the result of an auto accident at Sixth and Central avenue, was presented to the county clerk's office today for filing when the non-judicial days, brought about by the bank moratorium, are ended.

The plaintiff seeks \$5000 punitive damage, \$32 physician fees, and \$49.80 for car repair. Brand new! One lot of wool dresses. Famous "Bunny Fuzz Fabric." Ocher, beige, admirably blue and paprika red are the featured colors of the season: \$4 values grouped at \$1.49. "The store that saves you money." The Band Box & Shoe Box.

368 DOGS CAN BOAST NEW YEAR'S LICENSE

To date, 368 dog licenses have been issued by the county clerk's office. Last year the total was 1169 licenses.

The license fee this year was fixed by the county court at 50c for female dogs and 25c for male dogs. The fee, under state law, is doubled on March 1, but so far this has not been done, due to no action by the county court.

PENDLETON DELUGED BY RECORD RAINFALL
PENDLETON, Ore., March 4.—(AP)—In the heaviest downpour of the season 29 of an inch of rain fell here Friday night. The rain was driven in on a high wind from the southwest. Today was clear with a strong breeze from the west.

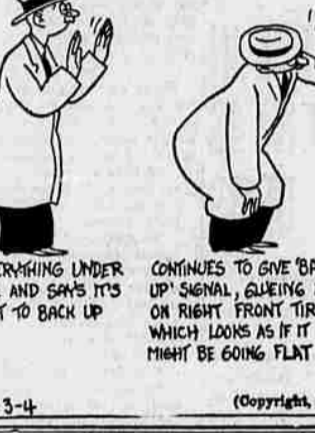
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



SNAPSHOTS OF A MAN HELPING HIS WIFE TO PARK

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—What Were You Saying?

By ULENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—The Dawning Truth!

By EDWIN ALGER



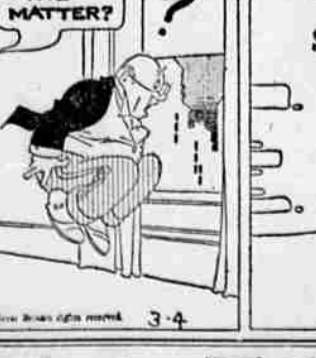
THE NEBBS—It's A Date

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



AGRICULTURE SUPPLY BILL GETS SIGNATURE
WASHINGTON, March 4.—(AP)—President Hoover today signed the fifth of the major appropriations bills for the next fiscal year, placing his signature upon the \$100,000,000 department of agriculture supply bill.

WASHINGTON, March 5.—(AP)—The President-elect and Mrs. Roosevelt left the White House late this afternoon after paying a call that lasted for more than an hour. They returned to the Mayflower hotel.

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