

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

When Margaret tells her husband, Jules, that Raisul, son of the powerful Kaid of Mekkan, broke into her room the night before, Jules takes anger. But Margaret feels he really only wishes to avoid a break with Raisul while her one desire is to return to her native England. But Jules and his father are agents for the Kaid and Jules will not leave. Margaret is horrified when suddenly she turns the tables by suggesting that she had tried to attract Raisul.

Chapter 30

JULES' AGREEMENT

In her need and dire extremity her husband helped her.

"So we'll cry quits," he said, "and understand each other. Any time that I'm—defeated, shall we say, 'bortook, 'under the influence—I have been drugged. Any time that Raisul makes himself, shall we say, 'a nuisance—it's a harmless flirtation and no harm done. As you say, we're absolutely in his power. And what's got to be done may as well be done cheerfully and with a good grace."

Margaret's blood boiled, and her fighting spirit raised its head.

Not for nothing had she grown up with Otto Hellme, shared all his games and sports and pastimes, followed him, fought with him, loved him and imbibed his ideas, adopted his beliefs, accepted his standards. "I say and I do" was Otto's motto.

She looked her head from her hands, looked at her husband in wonder and rose to her feet.

"I'm going home," she said quietly.

She had said it, and she would do it.

"Some day, perhaps," assented her husband. "When Raisul agrees—and provide the camels, mules, water, provisions, fodder, camel-men, muleteers and escort."

"Meanwhile," he continued, "suppose—just for a bit of fun, suppose—you don't offend and antagonise and infuriate our best friend and worst possible enemy. No more idiotic school-girl heroics. What are you staring at?"

For Margaret was regarding this man, her husband, with a cool, impersonal but searching scrutiny.

What was he—this thing? An evil that slipped through your hand as you grasped it, leaving nothing behind but a slimy emptiness? A quakeland, a morass which, looking like firm ground, gave way beneath your feet, leaving you "foundering—nay, foundering—in mortal danger? A haystack of feathers or soft wool, at which you struck in vain; a thing invulnerable in its softness, a thing against which one could beat oneself to death as one who beats the air until exhausted?

"I am going home," repeated Margaret. "Will you take me?"

"I won't and I can't!"

"Will you come with me?"

"No, I can't. My business..."

"I'm going home. If you take me, we'll forget this nightmare and start again in England. If you won't help me, but will come with me, we'll talk things over when we get to England, and if you'll promise not to come back to Morocco I'll do my best to continue as your wife. If you leave me to go alone, I will never speak to you nor see you again."

"I fully agree. You certainly won't!" replied Jules Mallign. "It's a pity Otto Hellme rushed off to the French Foreign Legion, isn't it?"

"I also fully agree. It certainly is," replied Margaret quietly, gently.

And nothing more that her husband could say had any power to provoke her to recrimination, contradiction or any show of anger.

The days and weeks that followed were such that occasionally Margaret looked in her little hand-mirror to reassure herself that her hair had not turned white.

More than once she had spent the night alone in her room, unable to sleep, in spite of the fact that she had doubly barred and bolted the door.

More than once she had encountered Raisul, in courtyard, garden and corridor and had frankly fled with more speed than dignity, pursued by his mocking laughter.

A specially hideous fear and a growing belief against which she fought and of which she was ashamed augmented her general state of terror, anxiety and apprehension and almost brought her to despair and defeat—the fear and belief that her husband's presence in the castle was no safeguard; that, far from being a tower of strength, he was a source of weakness and danger.

Indeed—though she shrank in every fibre of her soul from admitting the thought—she began to feel that he was a traitor in her camp... that the watch-dog was a treacherous wolf, a jackal, a hyena.

With him she held such conversation and communication as was polite and necessary, the while her hardened in her heart the determination never again to see his changed, deteriorated, loathsome face, once she had escaped from this terrible place and country.

For neither would he take her away nor so much as suggest nor discuss a date or time when they should depart; neither in any way help her to go away by herself nor admit the possibility of her doing so.

Nor would her father-in-law, to whom she appealed.

In fact, the Senor Pedro Mallign was—or affected to be—a little shocked and more than a little disappointed in her when she spoke of leaving Mekkan. He evidently held the excellent view that a wife's place is by her husband's side, though, in his own case, precept had been superior to practice.

When Margaret so far forgot tact and good manners as to allude to the fact that the senor's wife was but rarely at his side, he enlarged the precept by the addition of the words:

"Unless she can better serve his interests elsewhere."

And since Margaret was incapable of serving her husband's interests anywhere, she might, at least, he content, if not thankful, that she could comfort, solace and delight him.

Indeed her father-in-law's attitude was scarcely distinguishable from that of her husband, and such annoyance as she felt appeared to be caused rather by her own conduct than by that of Raisul.

Definitely fearing, by now, the Kaid and the Lady Zainub only less than she feared Raisul himself, definitely distrusting her husband and her father-in-law, as well as the girl Sara who treated her with a faintly contemptuous and thinly veiled hostility, Margaret's one hope was in her husband's mother, the Lady Elia Both el Ain, and that only because she felt that she, Margaret, was a pawn to be removed from the chess-board of Elia Both el Ain's own game.

As often as she could she visited Elia Both el Ain's room and remained there as long as possible. There she was safe, and there she could discuss possibilities and plans for her escape.

Sometimes her husband's mother would be kind and interested and almost enthusiastic; at other times, apathetic, bored and unhelpful.

Of course it could be done by a strong determined and plucky girl. She had made the journey from Tangier and she could make the journey back again. Hassan el Miskeen could guide her, and doubtless she could get Mahammed el Ain to lend two or three good fighting-men as escort.

He'd be quite willing to facilitate the departure of an outsider. He feared them and their invading ways, the infidel dogs, and hated to see them in the country, even Pedro and Jules, friends and helpers as they were. He didn't trust them; he trusted no Christians.

And Abu Talib Zerhoun el Munnah, the scribe, the Kaid's confidential secretary; Sara could get at him and he could do some very useful writings—and put the Kaid's seal on them—writings to be produced by Hassan el Miskeen when passing through the countries or towns of certain Governors, Kaid's and Tribal Chieftains who would at once become helpful.

Oh, yes, it was feasible enough—easy almost. Margaret could travel either as a humble Moorish woman, her face stained with walnut oil, or even as a youth, the son of Hassan el Miskeen. No, better as a girl, since she could not speak Arabic and need only veil her face in modest silence if addressed by a stranger.

On other days she was the helpless, hopeless pessimist and prophet of woe. What would Raisul do to her if he found out? What would he do to everybody who was concerned in the escape or whom he chose to suspect of being concerned in it? Would age or sex or anything else save them from a dreadful death?

And the Kaid and the Lady Zainub? What about them? What would happen to her, Elia Both el Ain, if she were such a fool as to put a real weapon into Zainub's hand?

No, it was unthinkable; it couldn't be done.

But Margaret was determined that it should be done or at least attempted. She sat down and wrote a three-word note.

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Margaret wonders whether the dars accept her only help, Monday.

MISS CABDELL ON RAILROAD TAFF

Miss Avis Lobdell who will speak Saturday at 9:30 o'clock in the court house auditorium on "Women's Place in International Peace," holds an important place in the staff of the Union Pacific system, acting as public relations head, and having charge of women's welfare work for the entire system.

Miss Lobdell began her career on the dramatic stage, has been a feature writer, dramatic critic, and press agent for a theatre, and was for some time connected with the Portland Oregon Journal.

A general invitation is being extended by the Rogue River College Women's Club as sponsors to all who are interested in international peace, to hear Saturday's lecture.

As the auditorium seats only 300, those who appear early may be assured of comfortable seating.

Hoover Continues Morning Strolls

NEW YORK, March 15—(AP)—Despite an overcast sky and a threat of rain, former President Hoover had his usual early morning walk today. He was accompanied by his son, Allan, and his secretary, Lawrence Richey.

ASHLAND CLERIC DRY CANDIDATE

Reverend Sidney Hall, pastor of the Ashland Methodist Episcopal church, announced yesterday in that city that he would be a candidate for election as a delegate to the prohibition repeal state convention, to be held within thirty days after a special election July 21, when delegates are to be selected.

He stated in his announcement that he has no political affiliations in this move, nor any quarrel with any wet candidate. He pointed out that he was asking only for the dry vote.

Reverend Hall has received the endorsement of the Rogue River Valley Ministerial Association, and four other dry forces.

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S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Tommy Was Afraid It Might Be Too Easy!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORRESTER



BOUND TO WIN—Jim Meets Ben

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Let James Do It

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



Train Limit Law Declared Invalid

The Arizona state law limiting trains to 70 cars and passenger trains to 14 cars has been declared unconstitutional in a decision handed down by Judge F. O. Jacobs at Phoenix, according to word received here today.

THIS RED TAPE SIMPLIFIES THINGS!

WRIGLEY'S DOUBLE MINT CHEWING GUM

TO OPEN UNWIND

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