

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

SYNOPSIS: As a snail slow, Margaret Murrill learns that Jules, her husband, not only has failed to protect her, but has betrayed his employer, the Kaid of Mekaszen. The Kaid plans a complete conquest of France, with the treacherous aid of Major Napoleon Riccoili of the Foreign Legion—and Major Riccoili plans to bring the Kaid later, Colonel Le Sage of the French Secret Service to Margaret's only refuge. He is discussing Riccoili with Margaret, with whom the traitorous Major has just offered to share the throne he believes he will win!

Chapter 38 RAISUL'S PLAN

KISMET! Kismet! Fate plays some funny tricks. Surely one of the funniest was to bring Raisul, looking for just such a tool, across the path of Riccoili. Le Sage continued.

"Raisul, who can pass as a Spaniard in Spain, an Englishman in England, and almost as a Frenchman in France, is really clever, really subtle, and therefore infinitely more dangerous than his father, who is merely a first-class robber Baron of the old pattern."

"And there again, strangely enough, it was Riccoili who brought Raisul under our more particular notice, for he was watching and cultivating Riccoili when I was doing the same thing. I have kept my eye on him ever since the year he became a captain; for even then he was a very remarkable man. And even then had amazing boundless ambitions, and made no secret of them."

"You won't be too deeply chagrined and hurt, I am sure, if I disclose to you the fact that he offered my own wife the same high destiny which he laid at your feet tonight."

Margaret smiled.

"I am a little disappointed, Colonel Le Sage," she said. "It takes a little of the gilt off the gingerbread for me."

"Yes, but I am going to take the gingerbread from under the gilt, for him," answered Le Sage, "and quite soon, I hope."

"Yes," he continued. "A Corsican officer of Chasseurs d'Afrique, who thinks in kingdoms and empires, is worth watching. Especially later, when his partner is the interesting Raisul, son and heir of the Kaid of Mekaszen; and most particularly so, when later still, he intrigues hard, moves heaven and earth, we may say, to get posted to the least desirable spot in the French African Empire, and that spot happens to be on the borders of Mekaszen."

"I wonder the French authorities didn't arrest Raisul," said Margaret. "Oh no, my child, that would never have done. In the first place, there were no grounds for doing so, for it is not a criminal offense to be the son of one's papa; and in the second place, once I was on his track and had a pretty clear idea of what was on, I should have been very sorry if the game had been stopped at that stage."

"Well, Raisul fooled Riccoili, and Riccoili fooled Raisul, or each thought he was fooling the other. Raisul saw his way to giving France a hideous shock as well as gathering in some very solid material advantages in the shape of the latest guns—very difficult to get hold of—rifles, and a large number of European-trained soldiers. Also officers and specialists, engineers, signalers, gunners and so on."

"Doubtless Raisul hopes that Riccoili will be a perfectly invaluable tool and weapon until the time comes to break it—and that will be the time when the tool begins to turn in its master's hand, the weapon to be two-edged. It may happen at once. Riccoili may show his hand now."

"And then exit Riccoili."

"And where did Riccoili fool Raisul?" asked Margaret.

"By pretending to be the tool, while intending to be the master. He hasn't the very faintest intention of really serving the Kaid of Mekaszen. Do you know what he has come here to do? Nothing more nor less than to seize this Citadel."

"What?" asked Margaret. "Capture the castle?"

"Yes. And whoever holds the Citadel holds the town. And, of course, the country. But Riccoili is not doing this for France. It is for himself."

"How do you know? How could you prove it?" asked Margaret.

"Know and prove? Well, I know because I have known Riccoili and the workings of his mind for a very long time; and because, thanks partly to you, Margaret, I know that his mind is working today, as it worked when first he brought himself to my notice, through his proposal to

my wife. But working now far more violently. That is how I know. "And as for proof, the fool has convicted himself not only in speech and in writing, but in act."

"When he left his base and came to the borders of Mekaszen, he was able to pick certain subordinates to go with his column. So was I. And one or two of the people whom he has corrupted were planted there to be approached and corrupted."

"It seems hardly believable," said Margaret.

"Yes, it would be unbelievable, if it hadn't been done before," replied Le Sage. "And I suppose you get at least one of that type in every generation of soldiers."

"Isn't it just possible," said Margaret, "that he is loyal; that his colossal ambition is working along the legitimate channel? Rash and unorthodox, vain and self-sufficient, if you like, but not a traitor? Might it not be that he sees himself the hero of France, and the idol of the army?"

"A successful Marchand of Fashoda, perhaps?" smiled Le Sage.

"No. But I am going to give him one last chance at the last second of the eleventh hour."

"Well, I've heard of sitting on a volcano!" began Margaret. "What would happen if there is an explosion behind your back?"

"Depends. If Riccoili acts first, and is successful, the explosion will be heard all over Europe. Incidentally, I shall probably be blown out of the castle, and I shall take you with me, Margaret, if you'd like to come. Not but what I should think you'd be safe enough here, for I don't for a moment think that Raisul and one or two of the others will survive the explosion. In plain English Riccoili will certainly shoot him and the Kaid for a start."

"Even so," replied Margaret, "if that happens, I'll go with you, please, Colonel Le Sage, if it can be managed."

"Yes, we'll get you away, all right, in disguise. Make a dirty little Arab youth of you and hand you over to my caravan-leader. You'll be safe enough then, provided you do what he tells you."

"I don't understand any Arabic, you know," said Margaret.

"He's a French officer, Captain Pierrepont of the Intelligence department," smiled Le Sage. "An officer and a gentleman. You'll be safe enough with him. Incidentally so is the dirty ruffian with the awful squint—the man who carried our notes. He is Major Langeac—a very handsome man when he takes off his squint and his dirt, and puts his false teeth in. He had all his beautiful teeth drawn—to facilitate his disguising himself. There's zeal for you!"

"There'll be fighting, in any case, won't there?" asked Margaret.

"Heaven knows what there'll be, my dear. There's bound to be a certain amount of shooting, I expect. It's impossible to say what will happen, whoever begins the debacle—Riccoili, Raisul, the Kaid—or Jules Maligni and Pedro Maligni with some game of their own—or I, myself."

"Haven't you got to anticipate in any case?" asked Margaret.

"No, not necessarily. Not so much anticipate them as act simultaneously; but contrarily. If Riccoili is able to act in time and seize the castle, I act too—and say, 'Thank you—my castle, I think, having laid my plans to be in a position to do so, plans depending on the conduct of the legionnaires to a great extent, as I said."

"If Raisul chooses to act before he's got all the column here and, deciding that Riccoili is not going to be his tool and weapon, cuts his throat, I must try to do my best with the section of legionnaires that is here. If they have been utterly corrupted, we must go—and see what I can do with the advancing reinforcements. I think I could manage them all right—and perhaps play Riccoili's part—play his game. But play it for France."

"In any event, don't worry, my dear. You shall get home all right." "Home!" breathed Margaret.

"Where is it?" asked Le Sage.

"Yeiverbury," replied Margaret. Not by so much as the flicker of an eyelid did Colonel Le Sage betray the fact that he had received one of the surprises of a lifetime.

"What did you say, Margaret?" "Yeiverbury."

"Ah... I seem to have heard of it, somewhere."

A blow from behind falls one in whom Margaret is greatly interested, tomorrow.

WILSON TREASURES BOOK OF DRAWINGS

"Beauties of Modern Architecture," published in 1830, a priceless treasure

belonging to H. L. Wilson of this city, was brought to The Mail Tribune yesterday by him, and inside the yellowed pages of the large volume were drawings, which were later carried out by Lanclot Creswell, grandfather of Mr. Wilson.

The book, dated 1832, beneath Mr. Creswell's name, contained many interesting drawings. The volume has been in the possession of Mr. Wilson for 49 years.

Mr. Creswell was well known in Ohio for his construction of the winding stairs at Antioch college, Yellow Springs, Ohio, and also for formulating the plan for the steeple of the First Presbyterian church in Springfield.

NATIONAL FORESTS WILL BE MERGED

WASHINGTON, March 24.—(AP)—R. Y. Stuart, chief of the United

States forest service, today announced consolidation of the Santiam and Cascade national forests in Oregon, and plans for reorganization into three national forests of four existing ones on the western slope of the Cascade mountain range in western Washington.

This plan involves the Mt. Baker, Snoqualmie, Rainier and Columbia

EARTHQUAKE RELIEF FUND IS AUTHORIZED

WASHINGTON, March 24.—(AP)—President Roosevelt today signed the \$5,000,000 California earthquake relief authorization.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Face At The Window!



BOUND TO WIN—Some Real Excitement



THE NEBBS—The Boss



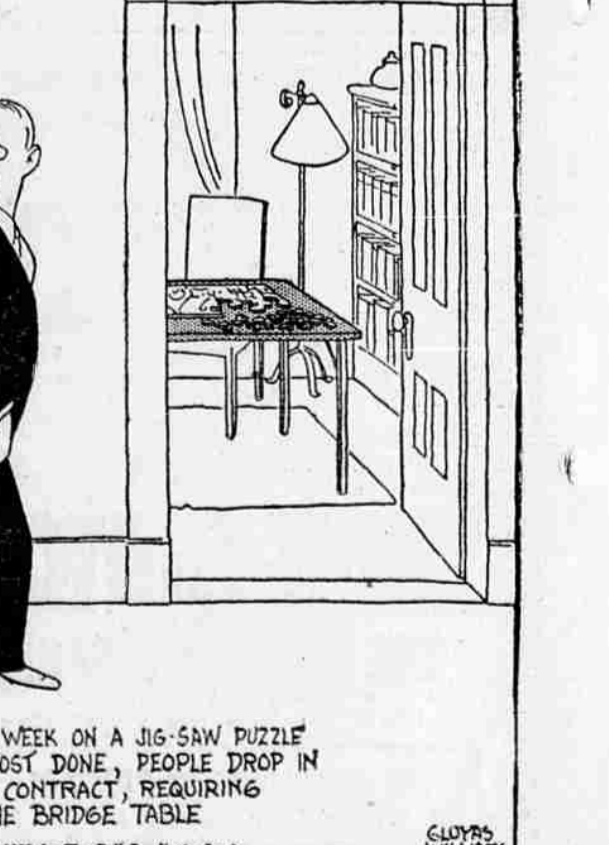
BRINGING UP FATHER



S'MATTER POP—



THE WORLD AT ITS WORST



YOUTH IS VICTIM OF UNLOADED GUN

LA GRANDE, Ore., March 24.—(AP)—Another victim of the "unloaded" gun was counted in eastern Oregon yesterday when Cooper Murrill, 9, was buried at Paradise, a little commu-

nity in Wallowa county. Murrill was shot to death by his brother, Lyle, 12, while the two were at play. Lyle pointed a small caliber rifle at his brother's head and, thinking it was unloaded, pulled the trigger he told officers.

The boys were alone at their home when the accident occurred. Lyle telephoned for a doctor, but when he arrived from Enterprise, the boy was dead.

Real estate or insurance—Leave it to Jones. Phone 795.

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