

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

SYNOPSIS: Just before Major Napoleon Riccoli of the Foreign Legion was ready to enter the Citadel of Mezzana as the first step in making himself Emperor of Northern Africa, Colonel Le Sage of the French Secret Service captures Riccoli. Le Sage explains to Riccoli how knowledge of Riccoli's double treachery to France and to his supposed ally, the King of Mezzana, has reached the ears of the King's heartless son, Ralsul.

Chapter 44
RICCOLI "CRACKS"
RICCOLI sat up suddenly. "Le Sage!" he said sharply, "did you talk to me to Pedro Maligni?"
"Oh, quite a lot. Oh yes."
"Le Sage, you never hand me, a fellow white man, a compatriot, a brother officer, you'd never hand me over to this devil, Ralsul, to be tortured."
"You're looking quite pale, Riccoli," Le Sage remarked.
"Look here, Le Sage, for God's sake tell me plainly, and let me know the worst."
"The worst, Major Riccoli, is that you, a French officer, are, for your own private gain, a traitor to France."
"Answer my question, Le Sage. Have you betrayed me to Ralsul? And are you going to let him torture me?"
"Betrayed you to Ralsul? No, Major Riccoli, not intentionally. Nor do I propose to hand you over to him. I am going to deal with you myself."
A look of cunning came into the eyes of Riccoli.
"The Kaid," he said, "Ralsul may have told him? Warned him?"
"Possibly," agreed Le Sage. "Almost probably, in fact. But Ralsul takes his own line—and it may cross that of the Kaid."
"And you have an appointment with the Kaid?"
"Tonight," agreed Le Sage. "Now, Riccoli, I said nothing, but his face spoke volumes."
"Oh no," laughed Le Sage in answer to Riccoli's unuttered thought. "He won't get me, Riccoli—though I'm banking on my belief that he thinks he will. Now I really must go."
Picking up Riccoli's pistol from the table, Le Sage went to the door. "Bellemé!" he called.
Otho entered and saluted.
"Which of your three is the staunchest, steadiest man?" he asked. "The man with the best head as well as the coolest courage."
"Legionnaire Mummery, Sir," replied Otho.
"Fetch him in," said Le Sage to Mummery, as Joe halted, saluted and stood rigidly at attention before him. "He is not to leave this room—alive. Lock the door after me, and do not open it until I knock—three times, then twice, then once, like this. If anyone else knocks in the ordinary way, take no notice whatever. If force is used, and the door is burst open—shoot this officer instantly—and then defend yourself. Understand?"
"Yes, sir."
Le Sage turned to Riccoli.
"You'll find this man incorruptible, Major Riccoli," he said. "Also prompt in executing orders. So let's hope none of your friends or followers knocks the door down, in search of you. If all goes well with me, I shall see you again later. If not—I am afraid the door will be burst open by someone or other, eventually."
"Follow me, and move quietly," ordered the Colonel, and led the way to the barrack-room.
"Attention," ordered the senior sergeant, as Le Sage entered, followed by Major Langeac who had joined him at the door.
"Absolutely right. Loyal, to a man," was the report of the latter. "I don't say that a few of them wouldn't have thrown in their lot with Riccoli, if he had brought it off and then declared himself. Anyhow, they're spilling for a fight—as always."
"Well, I want three more, for my job," said Le Sage. "You, Bellemé, pick me the three best men here—men you'd like to command for a fortnight, or have with you in a tight corner."
Otho called three names, Petrovitch, Ponsassin, Soif.
"Good. Fall in outside—the six of you."
"Carry on, Langeac, and good luck to you. The Kaid and Ralsul think Riccoli is not going to double-cross them until the rest of his column arrives. And as they don't connect me with Riccoli's show at all

I think we shall bring it off without firing a shot.
"Got it all clear? I go and collar the Kaid and Ralsul—before they collar me; and you seize all strategic points meanwhile, main gate, magazine, store-houses, water-tank, barracks, and all exits and entrances—gently relieving all sentries and substituting our own. Unless Maligni is playing a game of his own, the pass-word is 'Sheehuan,' and I doubt if in the absence of the Kaid and Ralsul, you'll meet with any opposition. Everybody will be too flabbergasted—especially as you have the pass-word."
The two officers shook hands.
"Good-bye, sir," smiled Langeac, "but I shall meet you again within the hour, at the flag-staff on the Sultan Tower."
Le Sage joined his chosen six.
"Now follow me in single file," he ordered, "and step like—er—ball-let-girls."
A few minutes later, at the foot of a flight of winding stairs, Le Sage signalled his men to halt and gather round him.
"Listen," he said, "and make no mistake. There may be some jutting. If so, let no man fire a shot until I do. If I use my revolver, then shoot. Or, if we're fired at, fire back. But if possible, I want there to be no noise. Understand, Bellemé?"
"We're going to capture the Kaid, and unless we have been betrayed, it will be an easy job. If we have been betrayed, it will be our last job. Come on."
At the top of the winding stair, the party was met by a short, stout, Moorish-looking man in hooded cloak who held a whispered conference with Le Sage.
"It's all right," whispered the Moorish man. "I sent Mohammed Ali el Amin off to his quarters, with a false order from the Kaid. Also, the Officer of the Guard, Langeac, will find that they'll sleep pretty heavily tonight."
"There will be nobody in the private audience-chamber when I admit you. And no one will come with the Kaid except myself, Abu Talib Zerhoun, and Ibrahim the Lion. Your men can deal with them! Good!"
"And Ralsul?" asked Le Sage.
"Ralsul's with Jules. Ralsul, too, is going to sleep soundly tonight! It is about time you got into the audience-room."
"Lead on," said Le Sage.
Having climbed another stair, and traversed several passages, the party, guided by the Moorish man, halted at a small and heavy door, set in a thick stone wall. This, the latter unlocked, and with a warning gesture that commanded caution and silence, led the way into a small octagonal room, furnished, as to the walls, with deep cushioned divans and silken hangings.
Opposite a kind of throne was a semi-circle of settees of European origin, arranged so that people having private audiences of the Kaid might be seated face to face with him, and facing him from a lower level.
"Stand here," whispered Maligni to Le Sage, indicating the settee. "as though you were going to take your place on the divan as soon as the Kaid is seated on the throne. Now then, the men must hide."
Le Sage turned to the Moorish man.
"That's all right," he said. "I can see no one but you. I'll go for the Kaid, locking the door behind me. The Kaid himself has the only other key. He'll unlock the door, and probably lead the way into the room, followed by Ibrahim the Lion and Abu Talib Zerhoun."
"It will be supposed that I am following—and that the four of us, headed by Ibrahim the Lion, will deal with you when the moment comes. But instead of following, I shall stand aside, and when the three have entered the room, I shall quietly close the door, lock it from without, and leave the key in the lock."
"When you hammer on the door, four double knocks, I shall know that all is well, and will open it."
"Now, my lads," said Le Sage quietly, "when I shout 'Ready, jump to it. No shooting. Rise-butts will do our business.'"
A quarter of an hour that seemed like a quarter of a century. Appalling silence.
The door into the audience chamber softly opens, tomorrow, and then—

POLK CO. OFFICIAL SHORT IN FUNDS

DALLAS, Ore., March 31. — (AP) — Announcement was made today of a

shortage of \$2058 for 1931 funds handled by Hugh O. Black, former county clerk, whose office was investigated by the Polk county grand jury last year. An alleged admission of the shortage was accompanied by a check for \$440, reducing the shortage to \$1618, the announcement said. The county court instructed an auditing firm to make a full inspection and audit and to report its findings to the grand jury.

UNLICENSED BANKS GIVEN PERMISSION

WASHINGTON, March 31. — (AP) — The treasury department today authorized unlicensed member banks to carry on fiduciary transactions.

HATCHET SLAYING SUSPECT INSANE

BAKER, March 31. — (AP) — Mrs. Rose May, charged with first degree

murder in connection with the death of her husband at the family home near North Powder, was found insane by Judge Charles Baird yesterday and was committed to the state hospital for the insane at Pendleton. She was also bound over to the grand jury by Judge Hugh Alfrey after a criminal proceedings in justice court. Mrs. May does not realize the seriousness of her position. She asks

simple questions about the appearance of her husband such as might be asked by a small child. The woman told Judge Alfrey "I don't care much about what happens to me, but I hope you will take care of my children."
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S'MATTER POP—

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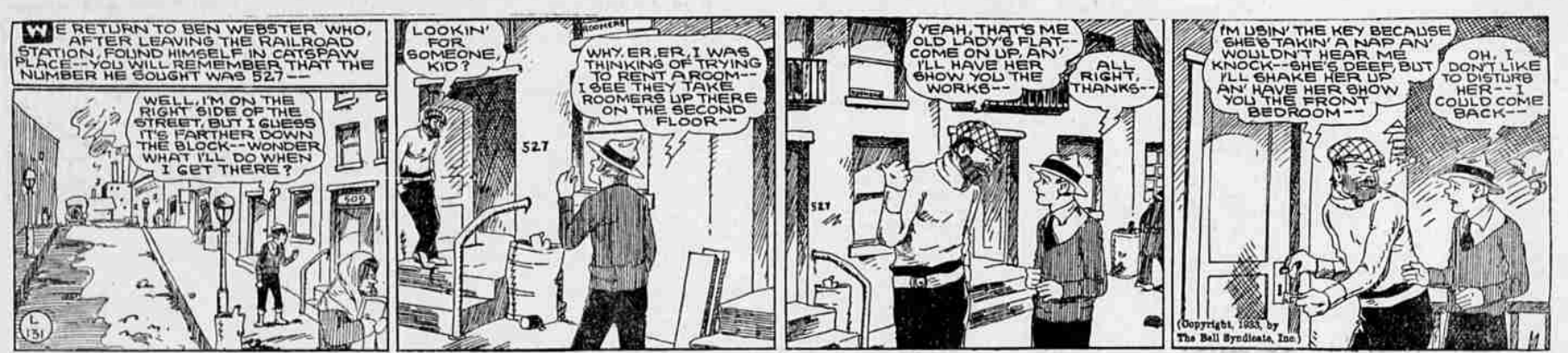


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By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



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THE NEBBS—The Hero

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BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



WOMAN FALLS FROM PHYSICIAN'S WINDOW

PORTLAND, Ore., March 31. — (AP) — Mrs. Irma Wolcott, about 55, fell to her death from a window on the eighth floor of the Medical-Dental building here today. Martha Reichter, nurse in the physician's office from which the woman fell, said Mrs. Wolcott walked into the reception room and said she wished to wait there for her sister. Miss Reichter left the room. A moment later she heard a noise in the waiting room, found the window open and saw the woman's body on the pavement below.

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