

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

Chapter 49 RICCOLI AGAIN

The truth about the cruel Kald of Mekazzen and his son Raisal was that although all feared them alive, none mourned them now that they had departed.

It was to be observed that those who mentioned their names spat as they did so, albeit they seemed relieved, as well as aghast that they had the temerity to do it.

Nor indeed was a single shot fired from any housetop as French reinforcements, headed by a Squadron of the Fifth Spahis Marocaines, and guided by an accredited emissary of the Vizier, rode through the streets of the Citadel that, mighty, impressive, and impregnable, frowned down upon the town.

"Orderly!" called Colonel Le Sage.

Otho stepped into the room, smartly saluting.

"I have been talking with—Margaret of Yelverbury, and making arrangements for her safe arrival at that famous place.

"She tells me she would like to have a word with you, before the caravan and escort start off."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, my boy, I should be giving the young lady tea in this room, in a few minutes. I am very busy. You shall deputize."

"Thank you, sir."

"Oh, you English!" ejaculated Colonel Le Sage as he strode from the room. "Face of stone—if heart of fire."

"Otho!"

"Margaret!"

"I'm not crying, Otho..."

"Margaret, this is absolutely the happiest day in all our lives—so far. Of course you're not crying."

"Otho, you will take care of yourself!"

"Cotton-wool, Margaret."

"Otho, the time will soon pass. And look I am coming out to Africa again. Dear, I can. I must. I shall."

Otho shook his head.

"To some perfectly good town, Otho. Sid' bel Abbes, Algiers, Oran. Whatever garrison-town or depot is nearest to where you are."

Otho smiled.

"Too good to be true, Margaret. I may be in some desert outpost, or some hole like this, for the rest of my service."

"Also, you may not. Did you know that Colonel Le Sage is married?"

"No. What about it?"

"Well, he is. And I'm coming out to visit his wife. Dear Otho! I'm going to stay with her. And Colonel Le Sage is going to stay with her, too. And he's going to bring his orderly. See?"

"Margaret! Margaret, there's so much to say, one can say nothing. What can one say?"

"Oh, yes," continued Margaret. "I have got something to say, darling. And that's about Colonel Le Sage, too. From Colonel Le Sage, in fact. Darling, he wants you to leave the ranks."

"Leave Joe Mummery and the other two?"

"Yes, darling. Yes, Otho. Look. It might shorten the time for us."

"How?"

"Do you know, Otho, that you have made a very deep impression upon Colonel Le Sage? Do you know what he actually, hinted at? ... A commission! As he said, you are a gentleman (a 'milord' in fact), clever, a linguist, a great fighter, as brave as a lion, and, as he put it, 'inexorably faithful unto death!'"

"Also you have distinguished yourself again here. He says, without you and your men he might have fallen against Riccoli and in the taking of the Castle."

"Oh, rot! Stop it, darling. Do. Don't let's talk about me. Let's..."

"Let's what?"

"This, and this, and this, and this..."

"Otho, you will take your chance, won't you?"

"Well, aren't I?"

"You know what I mean, darling. You will take your chance, Otho, for my sake?"

"Desert Joe and the others who came with me? No."

"But think what you'd be able to do for them."

"Yes, dear. Do for them altogether, I should think, if I left them in the lurch."

"But darling, we can't marry on a halfpenny a day! We could marry at

once, when you'd got your commission. Look, darling—I know. You talk it over with Joe Mummery and the other two, after you've seen Colonel Le Sage again. You will, won't you? Promise me that. I shall go away so much happier. Almost happy, Otho, if you'll promise me that."

Otho smiled, as he took Margaret in his arm—again.

"I promise that," he said.

.....

Colonel Le Sage knocked, in the appointed manner, upon the door of the room that had been Riccoli's quarters, and was now his prison.

"Guard the door outside," said he to the légionnaire who opened the door, and sprang to attention.

Removing the key from the lock, and pocketing it, Le Sage turned to Riccoli, who sat at his table, nervously drumming upon it with his fingers, and who eyed him with a feverish pale anxiety.

"You've come for my help, Le Sage?" he began. "But it will be on terms, on terms. I shall refuse to..."

"Listen, Major Riccoli," interrupted Le Sage. "The citadel, town, and country, of Mekazzen, are now in my hands—for France."

"The whole of what was your column is here, garrisoning the castle, picketing the town, and patrolling the secret routes by the oases and hidden waterholes."

"I have now a quorum of officers for a council of war, and I could try you this very day, by court martial. If I did so, you would be found guilty; you would be sentenced to death; and I would myself superintend the carrying out of the sentence, at dawn tomorrow. The firing-party, under Major Langeac, would consist of those légionnaires whom I know to be faithful, loyal, and obedient soldiers of France."

"But I shall not have you tried by court martial."

Riccoli smiled.

"I will take it upon me to spare France that scandal. There shall be no great Riccoli affair, eclipsing in shamefulness and European popularity the Dreyfus affair; eclipsing, because poor Dreyfus was an innocent man, whereas you, Major Riccoli, are a guilty one—a traitor to your country, your army, and your oath."

"No. There will be no court martial."

Riccoli laughed.

"I'm sure there won't, my good Le Sage," he said.

"No. No court martial, and no scandal. Do you see this revolver, Major Riccoli? And do you remember a little episode of many years ago, in which a revolver figured prominently? Do you remember my telling you that it contained one cartridge? And do you remember my spinning the chamber—thus?"

"And after all, it proved to be empty."

"Once again I offer you a revolver, Major Riccoli."

Riccoli extended an eager hand, seized the revolver and—presenting it at Le Sage's face, pulled the trigger. And again, and again.

"No, no, Major Riccoli," smiled Le Sage. "I had not forgotten what you did on the occasion to which I allude. You fired at me then, with what you thought was the sixth and certain shot. Didn't you?"

"Now go and stand in the corner of the room—there."

"Murder!" gasped Riccoli.

"Oh, no," replied Le Sage. "Stand there. So. Now—as I go out of this room, I shall, just before I close the door, slip you a cartridge."

Riccoli stared wide-eyed, aghast.

"Now, Major Riccoli, listen. And if ever you believed anything in the whole of your life, believe this now."

"You have your choice. And it is the only choice, of any sort or kind, that is left to you. You can die by your own hand—or by mine. For I swear by the Name of God, and the name of France, if you do not take your own life, I will myself, with my own hand, kill you in this room."

"In your life you have done me no harm to France. In your death you shall do none."

"In an hour's time I shall send a burying party to this cell."

As he closed the door, Colonel Le Sage contemptuously tossed a cartridge to Major Napoleon Riccoli, that Man of Destiny.

THE END

YOUNG BOURBONS GET BANQUET BID

Several members of the Young Democratic club of Medford are planning to attend the Jefferson banquet to be held in Portland April 15, it was announced yesterday.

One of the leading speakers at the banquet will be Edward C. Kelly of this city, successful Democratic candidate to the legislature from this district. Mr. Kelly was invited last week to address the banquet audience, and has accepted. Moore Hamilton, president of the local Democratic club, was appointed vice-chairman of the banquet, and is urging a good attendance from this district. The Southern Pacific has announced special low rates for the week-end and many southern Oregonians are expected to attend the Democratic celebration and remain in the Rose city for Easter.

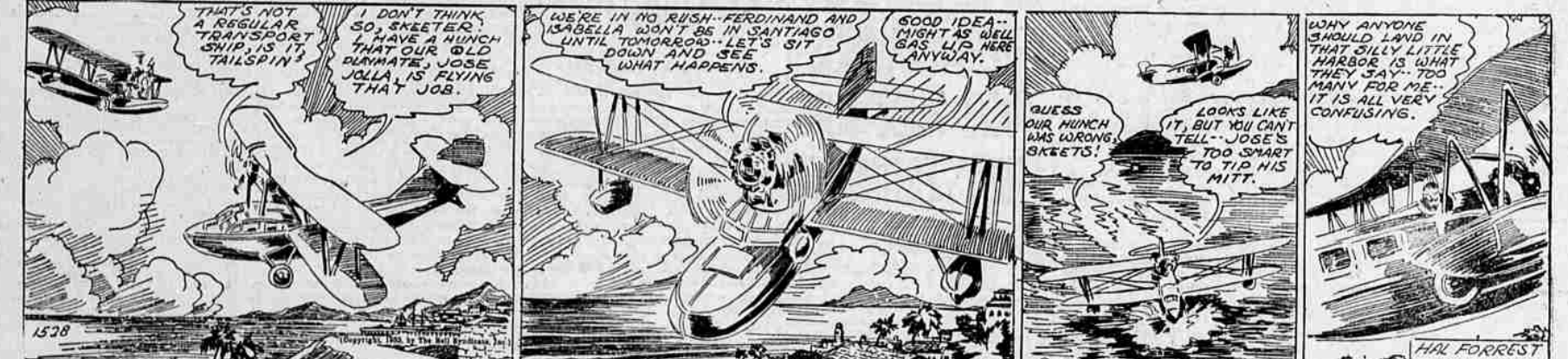
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



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TAILSPIN TOMMY—Aerial Tag Down Cuba's Coast!



BOUND TO WIN—In The Meantime---

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Moratorium

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



ROAD CONTRACTS LET APRIL 19TH

SALEM, April 6.—(AP)—Contracts totaling about \$75,000 will be let by the state highway commission at the meeting set for April 19 in Portland, it was announced today. The contracts will be paid for out of state funds.

The contracts, all for producing and piling of crushed rock and gravel, include: Jackson county—Trail-Prospect section of the Crater Lake highway, 4,800 cu. yds. of crushed gravel.

Drager Clerk Candidate SALEM, April 6.—(AP)—Fred E. Drager, for many years chief clerk of the house of representatives, announced here today that he would be a candidate for chief clerk of the constitutional convention to be called here sometime in August to vote on repeal of the 18th amendment.

THE FAMILY ALBUM—LIGHTS OUT

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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ONE KILLED, TWO HURT IN WILD AUTO SMASH

PORTLAND, Ore., April 6.—(AP)—One man was killed and two persons were injured here today when an automobile, traveling at high speed, careened out of control, skidded 180 feet, struck an uprooted tree 10 inches in diameter, and overturned on a lot. The driver, Walter V. Lewis, 40, was held without bail on a charge

of involuntary manslaughter. Police said he was drunk. Basil C. Littlepage, 40, was fatally injured, and Mrs. Charlotte Buckley and Wesley Hanson, 38, were hurt. WILLIAMSTON, Mich.—(AP)—A management practices at the Williamson wild life management project have resulted in a 480 per cent increase in pheasants at a cost of 47 cents a bird as compared with \$2.80 \$2.960 estimated as the cost of liberating each bird reared by state game farms. Actual increases on two tracts totalling 1,300 acres were 480 and 443 per cent. Tracts left unimproved for comparison showed an increase of 100 per cent in pheasant population.

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